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OR, TODDLES, THE TRAMP, IN CLOVER.

A Story of Good-for-Nothing Jerry,
the Ex-Bootblack.

BY JO PIERCE.

CHAPTER I. DRIVEN OUT.

JERRY knew there was trouble ahead the moment he entered the room, and saw the flushed face of Uncle Ben, the rigid lips of Aunt Sue, and Tom's surly scowl.

All this did not alarm Jerry. He had become accustomed to trouble. The streets of New York, in which he had to fight a daily battle for bread, were kind in comparison with the trio he had to meet when he returned to the miserable room on West Broadway. Jerry calmly awaited the storm. It was not long

THE GAMIN STOOD BRACED FOR THE ATTACK, DETERMINED NOT TO YIELD
WITHOUT A S. RUGGLE.

in coming. Uncle Ben, Aunt Sue and Tom alike glared at him, and their deep-drawn respiration sent the odor of whisky out into the room very perceptibly—for, if the truth be told, all three had been drinking and were in a quarrelsome mood.

When Uncle Ben was ready to act as spokesman, he did so with severity.

"Jerry," he remarked, "you've got ter go!"

"Go where?" Jerry stolidly replied.

"You can go ter Halifax, ef yer see fit, but you're ter leave this shebang!"

"I kin sleep on the stairs."

"You won't sleep on the stairs! You're ter leave this house, at once an' forever, an' never come back!"

Jerry's eyes opened widely in surprise.

"That so?"

"That's so! Want me ter tell ye ag'in? Fact is, we won't hev you around no longer; you don't earn yer salt, an' ain't worth yer keep."

"Everybody calls him Good-for-Nothing Jerry!" declared Aunt Sue, in vixenish lament.

"He's lazy as sin!" affirmed Tom.

"An' ungrateful!"

"An' deceitful!"

"An' weak-minded!"

"An', mebbe, a thief!"

"An' utterly good fur nothin'!"

One after another the amiable trio made their statements in regard to Jerry, but he heard the whole with phlegmatic unconcern. Every day for weeks, months and years he had heard the same complaints, and had become accustomed to them. There had been a time when he was whipped nearly every night, but he had rebelled on the latest occasion, and with such marked success that the experiment had not been repeated.

He made no answer to the last series of complaints, so Uncle Ben sharply added:

"Do you hear, vagabond?"

"I reckon," Jerry indifferently replied.

"We're goin' ter cast you off."

"All right," returned Jerry, without perceptible evidence of interest.

"You must leave here ter-night."

"All right."

"An' never come back."

"All right."

"Go at once!"

"All right."

Uncle Ben had become enraged by this continued indifference, and had stamped his foot angrily on the floor, but if Jerry had been a mere machine he would not have answered with less evidence of concern.

Nevertheless, it was an occasion and a crisis which would have moved any one of different temperament. Ever since he could remember he had been in charge of Uncle Ben and Aunt Sue, and at last he was set adrift without being allowed any time for preparation.

Really, this was a minor matter, as far as packing was concerned, for Jerry's worldly goods could be carried with him; but he had no other place in view where he could find shelter, or money with which to pay for accommodations.

All this failed to move him, and he arose and went to a hole in the wall of the miserable room. Then he turned around with more expression on his face.

"Whar's my blackin'-brush an' box?" he asked.

"Find 'em ef you kin!" retorted Aunt Sue, with a mixture of triumph and venom.

Tom burst into a loud laugh.

"Shine 'em up?" he inquired, derisively.

"Whar've you put my things?" Jerry continued.

"In the fire!"

"Eh?"

"In the fire!"

There was a pause. Having made this announcement, Aunt Sue put her arms akimbo and looked at the boy with a sneering smile. Jerry was touched, at last, and there was something very much like consternation in his expression.

"You don't mean it!" he finally responded.

"I do!" declared Aunt Sue. "Look ye, Jerry Higgs, you've run the length o' yer rope. Fur many a day back you've had fair warnin' what would happen ef you kept on in yer ways, but the money you brung us has been growin' less an' less; you've got so lazy that I reckon you don't brush off flies from yer nose when they tickle. You're ree'lly good fur nothin'. You've got so ye won't work—"

"Ain't I worked as much as Uncle Ben an' Tom?" asked Jerry.

"Me work?" snarled Uncle Ben. "Me work?"

"I'll hev ye understand that I don't work. I'm a gentleman!"

Never was a term more inappropriately applied. Uncle Ben was ragged, dirty, unshaven and unshorn, vicious and ignorant; and he was a habitual drunkard.

"Nor I don't work," added Tom.

"I do, an' I want my brush an' box."

"You can't hev 'em," returned Sue. "Why?"

"Cause they're in ashes. You thankless reptyle, go out an' starve ef you want ter; we won't hev no lazy-bones 'round us. This is a bee-hive, an' no drones can't stay. Folks always said you was good for nothin', but, as long as you brung us in a little money, we give you food an' shelter an' a good home. Now we're done with you, an' you kin git out. As for the brush an' box, they're burnt, an' you couldn't hev them nohow. They was ours."

"My money bought 'em."

"Our money, you mean."

"Who earned it?"

"Who give you food an' shelter?"

Jerry did not answer. For three years he had been the sole support of the miserable family, but he well knew that it would be idle to argue with them. He went to the stove. There he saw a mass not yet wholly consumed, and he could trace the shape of his box and brush. Aunt Sue had told the truth; they were in the fire, and hopelessly ruined.

He turned toward the trio. They had always hated him, even while receiving their support at his hands, and he was not surprised to see them grinning and exulting over his situation, now; but he was stirred out of the sluggish stolidity which their long persecutions had made his second nature.

To be set adrift did not then impress him as being anything more important than it would be to be sent for a loaf of bread, but to be deprived of his blacking-brush and box was a hardship of no small moment.

"You've done a mean thing!" Jerry declared, in a voice unsteady with anger.

"Help yerself ef ye can!" retorted Aunt Sue.

"I don't object ter leave, but why should you burn them?"

"Now you've got too lazy ter work, you don't go away an' use our personal property ter get your livin'."

It was useless for Jerry to remind them again that he had earned the money with which the brush and box were purchased; he did not waste breath in so doing.

"I'll pay you back, ef I ever get a chance!" he asserted, warmly.

"Eh?"

"It was merlicious mischief, an' you know it. You did it ter satisfy the unbounded meanness that is in ye, an' ter hit me when I'm down. But I don't care; I won't stay down, an' I'll pay you off, some time!"

Tom Jones arose, doubled up his fists and squared away like a pugilist.

"No threats, here!" he blustered. "You hush up, or I'll punch the nose off from ye!"

"Touch me, ef you dare!"

Jerry was several years younger than Tom, and, in height, several inches shorter, but he held the big vagabond in no awe. He flashed the retort at his enemy with spirit, but Tom still seemed inclined to fight with his mouth.

"No imperdence, or I'll do it!" he threatened.

"Come on!"

Tom turned to his father.

"Say, shall I send fur a policeman?" he asked.

"No, but ye might bring in some whisky," responded Uncle Ben, whose eyes were fast closing in the sleep of a drunkard.

Tom had weakened, and, being no longer threatened, Jerry did not aspire to remain.

Without another word he turned and walked out of the miserable, ill-kept room. He went with no worldly possession save the ragged garments on his back, and without money, as homeless as the wandering dogs of the street.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOOD GENIUS OF ATTIC TEN.

JERRY HIGGS was the child of misfortune. If he had other parents, he was not aware of the fact; he had never known a relative, near or distant. He had grown up in New York like the weeds of the field, as uncared-for, and simply because Nature willed it so.

His earliest recollections pointed to a house where he had lived with a family in great poverty. They had died when he was very young, and he had no means of knowing how he chanced to be with them. As their name had been Rogers, and his was Higgs, he had no reason to think that they had been relatives. They had

never been unkind, as far as he could remember, but they had been totally indifferent to him—so much so that, as a mere infant, almost, he had occasionally crawled into a box in a neighboring alley, and slept there all night unsought-for by them.

When they died, he fell into the hands of Uncle Ben Jones and his wife. After that, the boy's life was one of hardship and abuse.

For several years he had supported the family with his brush. The greater part of his earnings went to buy whisky and beer; some was used to procure bread; but only the merest trifle went to the laborer himself.

His reputation was not good.

Fortunately, no one had ever charged him with crime or vicious ways—though these things were not regarded with severity by the majority of the neighbors.

Jerry's spirit was crushed. Abuse, want, neglect and kindred evils had made him old before his time, in mental respects, and, while other children played, he passed his leisure hours in silence and stolid inactivity. The sobriquet of "Good-for-Nothing Jerry" had been applied to him, and, once started, it clung to him like a burr.

Those who thus branded him with words did not stop to ask what had made him as he was, or experiment to see if there was that within his nature where the seeds of other ways might find root.

The football of fortune remained uncared for and without encouragement—except from one quarter. His only friends were as poor and humble as himself.

Having left Uncle Ben's premises, Jerry walked out to the street. He stood on the sidewalk, his hands in his pockets, looking straight ahead. His expression was stolid, but, nevertheless, he was doing some thinking.

Where should he go?

He was homeless in New York! A million persons were his neighbors, but he had no home in which to sleep, nor any table at which to eat.

He noticed that not a lingering ray of sunlight was to be seen; night was near at hand.

"Mebbe I kin find a box ter sleep in!" he muttered, "an' I needn't eat anything afore noon."

He found some comfort in this view of the future. He was studying the situation as calmly as though he had no personal interest. No feeling of homesickness, grief or doubt assailed him; he was as phlegmatic as when, having earned some money by shining boots, he surrendered it to Uncle Ben without a protest.

"I'll go an' see Bess," the boy finally added.

He walked a few steps down the street and entered another house. It was tall, wide and deep, but in a condition of extreme old age and debility, as it were.

Jerry went to the top floor. This was divided into a long hall, with rooms on each side. Some person, in the past had gone the length of the hall and numbered each door with big, black, awkward figures.

Jerry knocked at No. 10.

It was answered promptly, and a girl of about his own age appeared—a small, active, bright-eyed, intelligent-looking child. She was not pretty, but hers was a very interesting face.

"Oh! it's you, Jerry!" she exclaimed, her face growing even brighter.

"Yes, it's me," he agreed, apathetically.

"Come right in! Father's away, and I'm real glad to see you!"

She hustled about with housewifely solicitude, and with the agility of a child combined with the dignity of maturer years, and soon had him seated.

Evidently she was a precocious child, and, also, circumstances had been a severe teacher for her. The room bore evidences of extreme poverty, but was neat to an extreme. The latter fact was due wholly to her, for she and her father were its only occupants.

"Business good to-day?" Bess asked, briskly.

"Toler'ble."

"The high-toned folks do have to get a shine."

"Yes."

"You and I don't need any."

Jerry looked down at his bare feet.

"They're 'bout black enough ter be improved by a shine," he observed, dubiously. "I forgot ter wash 'em afore I came, Bess."

"Never mind, Jerry; you'll be in another business, some day, and wear patent-leathers."

"Mebbe. I've quit Uncle Ben's!"

"You've what?"

His statement was phlegmatic; her question was one of surprise.

"I've left thar."

"Left there—for good?"

"Yes."
 "What are you going to do now?"
 "Dunno."
 "I don't understand."
 "I've got all done at Uncle Ben's, an' ain't go-
 in' there no more."
 "Why not?"
 "Got tired of 'em."
 "And you're going to leave?"
 "Yes."
 "But you're going to keep on shining shoes?"
 "Dunno!"
 "Jerry, you are not dealing squarely with
 me; you don't look at me, but at the floor.
 That isn't right; I want you to speak right
 out!"

Her manner was one of mingled reproof and
 authority. It was not the first time she had ad-
 dressed him thus. Her nature differed greatly
 from his. He was apathetic; she was bright,
 hopeful and resolute. She was ambitious, and
 full of plans and resources. Jerry's acquaint-
 ance with her had been the one bright oasis in
 his unhappy life, and she had great influence up-
 on him. When with her, he seemed to be lifted
 above his wretched lot. Although a little the
 younger, she had taken the lead by force of cir-
 cumstances, and to his satisfaction, and was his
 guide and teacher.

Her reproof was as effective as usual.
 "Fact is," he confessed, "I've been ordered
 away from Jones's."

"Why?"
 "They say I'm good for nothin'."
 Bess's eyes opened widely.
 "But you've been supporting them, wholly."
 "Yes."
 "Then why should they cast you off?"
 "Dunno!"

Bess was silent for a moment. She knew that
 Jerry was still keeping something back, and she
 was cudgeling her wise little head to solve the
 mystery. Suddenly her eyes sparkled.

"Jerry," she cried, "was it because you didn't
 give them enough money?"

The boy tried bravely to give a negative re-
 ply, but he was not equal to the task of telling
 a falsehood to her. His confused silence an-
 swered her.

"And you've been giving your money to us!"
 she exclaimed, in dismay.

The secret was out. Bess and her father were
 desperately poor, and Jerry had been bestowing
 a share of his earnings upon them for some time
 —as a loan, it was understood, though no one
 except Bess ever expected to see the debt
 paid.

All this was in the way of legitimate business.
 The Jones parasites had complained long and
 loudly when the money handed over by their
 boy supporter began to fall off, without suspect-
 ing the cause of the decrease. But, as every
 cent was Jerry's, in the full sense of the word,
 he had a perfect right to give it to whom he
 pleased.

Bess had felt misgivings in the past, but he
 had reassured her.

Now the blow had come.
 "Tain't nothin'!" stolidly affirmed Jerry.

"But you've lost your home for us!"

"I'd do more'n that for you, Bess!" the Foot-
 ball of Fortune cried, flashing out of his
 apathy.

"But what will you do now?"
 "Dunno!"

"It's very odd they sent you away when you
 were supporting them wholly. How will they
 live now? They don't work, and they won't
 work. Why should they send away their sole
 means of support?"

Jerry wished to say "Dunno!" again, but
 there were times when Bess reproved him for
 using the word. Her nature was too brisk to
 take kindly to the idea expressed by "Don't
 know!"

Fearing a reproof, Jerry remained silent.
 "There's a mystery here!" declared the girl.

"Where?"
 "Why, those wretches had a reason for send-
 ing you away. You're not a lost prince, are
 you?"

Jerry had nothing romantic in his nature.
 "I got lost down-town one day," he gravely
 replied.

"You can depend upon it they made more by
 sending you away than they were making by
 keeping you!"

The boy gazed at the speaker in open-eyed
 wonder, thoroughly aroused. So was Bess.

Her eyes gleamed; her cheeks flushed, and she
 was eager in the pursuit of the idea she had
 formed.

She believed there was a deep mystery in the
 case.

CHAPTER III.

"YOU ARE MY PRISONER!"

GOOD-FOR-NOTHING JERRY gradually grew
 grave and shook his head.

"Tain't possible!" he decided.
 "Why not?" Bess inquired.

"How could they make anything by lettin'
 me go?"

"Somebody that's rich pays them; you're the
 son of rich parents, and were cheated out of
 your rights. Now, your enemies want to get
 rid of you so that the lawyer can't find you, and
 take your money away from your unjust rela-
 tives!"

If Jerry was stolid, he also had an abundance
 of common sense when occasion demanded, and
 it was of the practical kind.

"You're the best person I ever knowed, Bess,"
 he certified, "but you're on the wrong track,
 now. Me, the son of rich folks? It don't wash!
 I ain't built that way!"

"Jeremiah, you're talking slang!"
 "I forgot," answered Jeremiah, meekly.

"Furthermore, you opposed me when I said
 you were the son of rich folks—you denied it!"

The reproof was too much for Jerry Higgs.
 "Mebbe I be sech a chap," he admitted, and
 would have acknowledged being the Prince of
 Wales, had Bess insisted upon it.

But Bess, with all her imaginative zeal, was
 not able to surmise just what great fortune he
 had been wronged out of, or how he was to get
 it, though the case was thoroughly discussed.

Bess's surname was Gray, and she was the
 daughter of Anthony Gray. The latter gentle-
 man now somewhat advanced in years, was ex-
 tremely eccentric, and, by common consent, the
 neighbors called him "Mr. Jumbletop."

This implied a doubt as to his sanity, but it
 did not trouble him in the least—though the
 same could not be said of Bess.

Among Anthony Gray's many eccentricities
 was one which was to be seen in the attic at all
 times.

In one corner of the room was the old gentle-
 man's bed, and, close beside it, back against the
 wall, was a contrivance which, in plain terms,
 was a cylindrical piece of wood—a portion of a
 log—four feet long and a foot, or more, in di-
 ameter. This had four small sticks set into it at
 regular intervals, for supports, or legs, so that
 the whole concern was a sort of bench about as
 high as a chair.

Upon the bench was strapped a saddle—just
 the same kind of a saddle, and strapped in the
 same way with a girth, as though it rested up-
 on a real horse instead of a wooden dummy.

This was all that was visible when Anthony
 Gray was absent. When present, he usually sat
 astride of the saddle, exactly as though riding a
 horse.

He was supposed to sit there all the time, but
 this was a delusion of the neighbors. Age was
 telling upon him, and he was glad to seek an
 easier position, frequently, but it was a fact
 that, when any one was present, he was to be
 found sitting on the saddle, holding his stout
 cane.

If called upon to describe Mr. Gray, these
 same neighbors would have said:

"Crazy as a March hare, but perfectly harm-
 less, and a real gentleman. Too old and feeble-
 minded to do any work, he sits on that saddle
 day after day and year after year. Why he
 does it nobody knows, except himself, and he
 won't tell. Poor Mr. Jumbletop! his mind is a
 wreck, but you can't find a better man any-
 where than the tenant of Attic Ten!"

Ten, it will be remembered, was the number
 of Mr. Gray's room, and all the rooms on the
 top floor were familiarly known as "attics."

The boys of the big tenement-house called the
 old gentleman "The Saddle-Rider," but even
 they liked him. Eccentric as Gray was, he had
 many friends and no enemies.

Bess knew no better than anybody else why
 her father had the saddle, or why he sat upon
 it, but she did know one fact that was not so
 plain to others.

Mr. Jumbletop regarded the saddle as some-
 thing valuable beyond price. He was not only
 very careful of it, but was always in great fear
 lest it be stolen. He watched it jealously, and
 when he retired for the night one end of a cord
 was tied to the saddle and the other to his wrist.

It annoyed him to have any one except Bess go
 near the saddle, and the curious gaze of a neigh-
 bor, if directed to it, filled him with nervous
 apprehension.

There had been a time when Bess suspected
 that the old saddle might contain hoarded
 money, but, when they grew poorer and found
 it hard to get the necessities of life, his earnest

assertion that not a dollar was hidden there
 caused her to abandon the theory.

After that she thought, at times, that the
 whole matter was due to his eccentricity, only
 to have some later incident convince her that
 there was some great value that attached to the
 saddle.

The whole affair was a mystery.
 Jerry and Bess remained in conversation for
 sometime. She was grieved and worried, for,
 whatever was the real reason of Uncle Ben's
 severity toward Jerry, the ostensible cause of
 the latter's banishment was the decrease in the
 sum given Jones, and this falling off had been
 due to the "loans" made by Jerry to the Grays.

Mr. Jumbletop had been a maker of fancy
 baskets. Of late his cunning had about failed
 him, and nearly all the work was done by Bess;
 but there had not been demand enough to keep
 her nimble fingers busy for some time past.

This had made them short of money, and
 Jerry had insisted upon loaning them enough to
 "keep the wolf from the door."

A knock interrupted the young couple, and
 Bess hastened to answer it. A young lady and
 gentleman stood in the hall.

"Excuse me," said the latter, politely, "but
 does Mr. Jumbletop live here?"

"Mr. Anthony Gray lives here," Bess replied,
 with dignity arising from resentment.

"Isn't this Number 10?"
 "Yes, sir."

"I was told that Mr. Jumbletop lived at that
 place."

"He does, but my father's name is Gray.
 Only the ignorant and ill-mannered call him
 'Jumbletop.'"

"I beg your pardon, young lady; I meant
 no offense, but used the name as it was given
 me."

The reply was courteous and pleasant, and
 Bess's face assumed its usual sunny expression.

"You are quite excusable, sir; pray don't
 mention it," she returned, with her womanly air.

"And is Mr. Gray in?"
 "No, sir; but I expect him every minute.
 Will you walk in?"

The young man glanced at the young lady,
 who promptly answered:

"Thank you, my dear, we will. We wish to
 see your father particularly."

They entered. There was a scarcity of chairs,
 but Good-for-Nothing Jerry retreated to the
 saddle and sat down there, which left accommo-
 dation for all. Bess looked to the wants of the
 visitors with care and dignity worthy of a
 head far older, and, unknown to her, at once
 won the heart of the young lady. Her ways
 were quaint and interesting in the extreme.

The visitors made an impression equally good.
 As has been said, both were young. The lady
 looked to be about twenty; the gentleman was a
 few years her senior. Both were well and
 fashionably dressed, and appeared to be blessed
 with abundant common sense.

"Your father is the basket-maker?" the young
 lady questioned.

"Yes, ma'am," Bess replied.
 "Do you help him?"

"Oh yes."
 "Is this your brother?"

"No, ma'am; he's Jerry Biggs."
 "Does he make baskets?"

"No; he is a—"
 Bess hesitated, but Jerry, who felt stirred out
 of his apathy, plainly replied:

"I shine shoes!"
 "Indeed! I'll give you a job, if your outfit is
 here," the gentleman said.

"Tain't here."

Jerry felt a twinge of pain as he remembered
 that his means of earning a living were in Aunt
 Sue's fire. If he had them he might earn enough
 to get sleeping accommodation in a Bowery
 ten-cent lodging-house. As it was, he had no
 place whatever in which to sleep. The Grays
 had but one room.

"My name," resumed the young lady, "is
 Lovella Henderson. Have you heard Mr. Gray
 mention me, recently?"

"No, ma'am."
 "I met him."

"He didn't mention it."
 "It was a very annoying affair to me,"

Lovella pursued, and her manner corroborated
 her statement. "There is a certain man from
 whom I differ greatly on peculiar business mat-
 ters, and, as a result, he feels very bitter toward
 me. On the occasion to which I refer, he made
 an unjust accusation against me, much to my
 embarrassment, and I only met him with the
 aid of Mr. Jumbletop—excuse me! but that was
 the name he then gave. I—I offered him a re-
 ward, but he would not take it."

Bess looked grave. She was not surprised, but she did not see how her father could afford to refuse any honest reward.

"My enemy," added Miss Henderson, "is now trying to make more trouble for me. I think it is because your father is not at hand to prove my innocence, but, fortunately, I had his address."

She glanced at the card in her hand. It bore her own name, with an irregularly-written line below:

"A. Jumblistop, No. —, West Broadway, Attic 10."

No wonder that they had not inquired for a Mr. Gray, with such a guide in Anthony's own writing.

"My father has not mentioned it, but I hope he can help you. He will, too, gladly, if—he can."

She checked herself as she was about to add: "If he remembers the occurrence."

The Saddle-Rider's memory was often treacherous.

"I hope he can, for a good deal is at stake, and—I actually fear arrest!"

"Arrest!"

"Yes, though it would be cruel and undeserved," Lovella nervously explained.

Jerry felt that the chance had come for him to obey Bess's frequently-repeated injunctions, and rise out of his apathy. He stood up promptly.

"If they touches you, I'll thrash them!" he declared, stoutly.

He astonished the visitors, Bess and himself, one and all. It was a rare thing for his down-trodden nature to assert itself, but he felt new life in his veins, and a feverish desire to risk that life for Lovella.

The gentleman clapped his hands.

"Bravo!" he cried. "Here is an honest champion whom we must not overlook."

Before more could be said there was another knock at the door. Bess opened it, and saw a respectably-dressed, but unprepossessing-looking man there. He pushed past her without a word, and swept a glance around the room. His regard became fixed upon Lovella.

"I'm a detective," he announced, with a disagreeable smile, "and have a warrant for your arrest. You are my prisoner!"

CHAPTER IV.

JERRY HEARS OF THE FAMILY FEUD.

THERE was a brief silence in Attic 10, but it was by no means one of commonplace nature. The detective stood in unfeeling triumph; Lovella and her escort were dumb with dismay; while Jerry and Bess looked on in wonder.

Lovella's companion was the first to recover the power of speech.

"Who are you?" he demanded, indignantly.

"As before stated, I am a detective. I have the advantage of you as to names; I know yours, Mr. Brinsley Choate. My legal name is but a humble one—John Joy, at your service."

"And your business here—"

"Is to arrest her!"

Joy pointed to Lovella.

"Prove that you are a detective!" commanded Brinsley Choate.

Joy exposed his badge.

"And now, your warrant?"

The detective produced the paper, which Choate examined close y.

"Can you deny its correctness?"

"I cannot!" Choate admitted.

"Then I will at once take Miss Lovella Henderson away as my prisoner!"

Good-for-Nothing Jerry confronted the detective with flashing eyes.

"Don't yer try it!" he cried.

"Eh?"

"Don't yer touch her!"

"Why not?"

"Because, ef you do, I'll knock you down!"

The detective gazed at the boy in silence. He was too much surprised to speak. There was nothing like idle braggadocio in the boy's manner; no ridiculous desire to "show off," such as afflicts some boys, at times; but Jerry was as much in earnest as though he were a six-footer. Really, he was so small that Joy had to look far down to see him.

"Here's a bantam rooster!" ejaculated Joy.

"Touch the lady, an' see!"

"Go away, mosquito!"

With this contemptuous retort the detective turned again to Lovella.

"Come with me!" he tersely added.

Choate had been studying the intruder closely, and had arrived at the conclusion that Mr. John Joy was an unprincipled rascal. He deter-

mined to try an experiment based upon this belief.

"Mr. Joy, I don't suppose you make much out of this job. Eh?"

The detective turned an attentive eye upon Choate.

"No, I don't," he responded.

"You ought to get something out of it."

"All folks are not generous!"

"Some, are! Mr. Joy, here is a ten-dollar bank-note. If you will burn that warrant, give up your errand here, and let us alone in the future, this 'X' is yours!"

The limb of the law rubbed his retreating chin gently.

"Justice should not be thwarted," quoth he.

"Do as I wish, and justice will not be thwarted."

"The law should not be thwarted—not for less than two ten-dollar bills."

"Will that amount hire you to do as I wish?"

"I have a daughter," deposed John Joy, holding one hand over his heart. "I am not deaf to the demands of mercy and pity. Convey the bank-notes to me, esteemed sir, and I'll burn the warrant, go away, throw my employer off the track, and never annoy you further!"

The money was handed over, and then Choate had the pleasure of holding a match to the warrant and seeing it fade away to ashes.

"Permit me, now," added the detective, "to wish you good day. Should you, Mr. Choate, require my services at any time in the future, pray call upon me. You will find me zealous and faithful to your cause; a veritable blood-hound of the law, whom nothing can corrupt or make afraid. Worthy sir; and you, young lady; and you, young miss; and you, pugilistic product of New York's streets, good-day!"

Speaking slowly, gravely, with every appearance of sincerity, and with divers low bows, Mr. John Joy went backward out of the room. When his steps ceased to be heard, Choate shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish we had some disinfectant, to purify the air," he remarked. "A more unconscionable knave never breathed the air; treachery is the yoke-mate of greed in the conduct of his life."

"Have we seen the last of him?" Lovella asked, doubtfully.

"It's the toss of a coin; I really don't know."

"He frightened me!" and Miss Henderson shivered.

"Plainly, something must be done, or Luther Henderson will bring serious trouble upon you."

"What can we do?"

"Wait a little."

"Ef you want any help, call on me!" volunteered Jerry Higgs. "I'll work for yer, fight for yer, or do anything else!"

"What would become of your bootblack business?"

"Nothin'. I'm out on it."

"I thought you said you shined shoes."

"That's my *perfection*," Jerry explained, "but I ain't follerin' it jest now, owin' ter circumstances. I'm willin' ter try my hand at anything—except," he slowly added, "pullin' teeth. I ain't no good at that, I reckon."

This statement was made with such gravity and candor, and so wide from the limits of an attempt at jocularity, that it proved very amusing to Choate and Lovella.

At this point they were interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Gray.

He was seventy years old in appearance, and less than sixty in reality, but ill-health had made him gray and weak beyond the average of men. He was commonly regarded as an old man, and really believed such to be the case himself.

He had an intelligent, kind face, but it was not one of power. Irresolution was perceptible in every distinguishing feature, and, also, was visible in his manner. He was dressed in a suit of black which had once been of good quality and style, but which had grown old-fashioned, faded and seedy.

When he entered and saw that strangers were present he looked quickly toward the saddle. No one being near it, he became reassured at once.

Bess hastened to introduce him.

"Do you remember me, Mr. Gray?" Lovella then asked.

"No, madam," he replied.

"Have you forgotten the scene at the Christopher street ferry-house? I was the lady you helped."

"Yes, yes; I remember now."

"I have called with the hope that you can aid me."

"I?"

"Yes, sir."

"We are too poor to help even ourselves."

"But you remember the circumstances?"

"Oh, yes."

"Please describe the scene as you saw it."

Mr. Gray immediately grew confused.

"I don't know as I can do it," he acknowledged.

"You can testify that my companion of that occasion carelessly left his valise while he went to purchase a book."

"Yes, yes."

"And that I was sitting by your side and did not go near the valise while he was away?"

"Yes, yes."

"That will be all that is sufficient, and you will stand between me and harm while you are able to affirm this."

"I shall be pleased to help you, madam," Mr. Gray replied, with courtly politeness.

He then went to the saddle, toward which he had been casting wishful glances, and sat down astride of his peculiar seat. Bess would have been pleased to see him take a position more graceful at that particular time, but she made no comments. Brinsley Choate had never heard of the Saddle-Rider's eccentric habit, and his face expressed wonder.

Lovella, however, went on rapidly:

"In justice both to you and to myself, Mr. Gray, I wish to make the exact situation plain to you. Between my family, the Hendersons, and another family whose name is Reyburton, a bitter feud has long existed. I need not go into particulars to explain what started it, for my object is merely to explain my own connection with the affair."

"For some years there have been no Hendersons around here with the exception of myself and a certain Luther Henderson, who was my father's cousin."

"My father, otherwise a very worthy man, was as bitter against the Reyburtons as any one, and I was reared with the idea constantly before me that the Reyburtons were all that was mean and evil, and that I must hate them accordingly."

"As the original quarrel dated back fifty years, and was a minor affair, according to my opinion, I could not see why I should waste any breath in such a hatred. Accordingly, I was always a very lukewarm partisan."

"Two years ago, when I was nineteen, my father died. Luther Henderson was made my guardian, and I continued in his charge until two months ago, when I became twenty-one, and fully my own mistress."

"Since my association with Henderson he has given me no peace; he demanded of me the most bitter, illogical and unceasing hatred of the Reyburtons that human power could give."

"I never hesitated to give my own views, and as a result he frequently upbraided me. He was very suspicious, and often accused me of disloyalty to the family. He was terribly in earnest, and my oft-repeated expressions of indifference—I regret, now, that I ever uttered them—finally caused him to hate me, too, and to hate in earnest."

"Since I became my own mistress his enmity has known no bounds. Constantly afraid that I would do something to humble the Hendersons in their fight—now one of words—with the Reyburtons, he has suspected me of that and many other things."

"If there was anything he did not suspect me of I don't know what it was."

"The final crash came a few days ago."

"Henderson held the deed of certain property in Newark. He learned by chance that the agent who had purchased for him had forgotten to have the paper recorded. Then he became in a panic to have the neglect repaired."

"We still kept up a kind of cold, formal acquaintance, and as I was going to Newark also, we became companions on the trip, starting for our destination by way of Hoboken."

"At the Christopher street ferry-house Luther Henderson left his valise momentarily, with the deed in it. When he remembered his carelessness he returned in haste and looked in the valise."

"The document was gone!"

"You know, Mr. Gray, what followed. He accused me of stealing it, and, had you not been able to assert that I had not been near the valise, trouble would have followed. The errand of Joy proves that he is still trying to get me into difficulty."

"All this, I firmly believe, is the result of a deep plot which Henderson has formed against me."

CHAPTER V.

THE VAGABOND IN THE BOX.

IOVELLA finished her story, and there was a brief silence. It was broken by Good-for-Nothing Jerry.

"By Jeminy! I'd jest like ter deal with that mean critter!" he declared, forcibly.

Bess looked at her young friend in wonder. Once again, on this eventful day, he had asserted himself with strength which was very foreign to his apathetic nature.

It was a good sign, and so Bess regarded it.

Iovella smiled faintly.

"Pray, what would you do with Luther Henderson?" she asked.

"Ef he touched you, I'd thrash him!" declared Jerry, his eyes flashing.

"You are very kind."

"You're good!" asserted young Higgs, "an' I'd thrash anybody who'd touch yer!"

Brinsley Choate had been regarding the Football of Fortune earnestly ever since the first explosive remark that followed Iovella's story.

"My lad," he now said, "did I understand you to say that you were out of work?"

"That's the fack."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Dunno!"

"Would you like a situation?"

"What's that?"

"He mean's a job, Jerry," Bess explained.

"Oh! Wal, I've got ter hev a job."

"Do you live here?"

"No."

"Have you parents?"

"No."

"I presume your guardians and recent employers would give you a good character?"

Bess's face had grown bright and hopeful, but it grew grave as she heard the last words. If he had to rely on the Jones tribe for a good character, he would never get any. Jerry had built no air-castles when Choate began, and the course of the inquiry gave him no concern. He answered in a very matter-of-fact way:

"Ef anybody takes me, they must take me ez they find me; I've got ter stan' on my own legs."

"I'll be his recommend, and so will papa!" eagerly asserted Bess.

"Well, we will see," Choate promised. "It is growing dark, and we must be going, but I want to see you again, Jerry. Perhaps I shall be able to help you. Will you call on me, tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"Then come to the address on this card."

He extended the bit of pasteboard, which Bess quickly seized and carried to Jerry.

Iovella arose, and, after getting Mr. Gray's assurance that he would give testimony in her behalf whenever it might become necessary, she and Choate left Attic 10 and went their way.

"Ain't they splendid?" Bess cried, with enthusiasm.

"Boss!" Jerry agreed.

"I don't like them," declared Anthony Gray.

"Why not, father?"

"They kept looking curiously"—a pause—"at me and—and"—a longer pause—"my seat here."

The old gentleman's face expressed the fear which he would not have admitted in words. He was mild and gentle of nature, but it always stirred him up to have any one even look at the old saddle. Once, when a would-be jolly neighbor had insisted upon sitting down on the saddle, himself Jumbletop had horrified his daughter by seizing a broom as a weapon and threatening the person with assault.

Now he was suspicious and troubled, but in a subdued way.

"Probably they never saw such a seat in a room before; they meant no harm," Bess answered, soothingly.

"They were very ill-mannered to show such uncalled-for curiosity," irritably asserted the Saddle-Rider.

"I'm goin'!" Jerry suddenly announced.

"Back to the Joneses?"

"Not much!"

"Where?"

"Oh, I'll spend the night with a friend o' mine."

The Football of Fortune spoke carelessly, as if it were the most commonplace affair in the world, but it remained a fact that he had no friend to whom he could apply. A box or a barrel was the only shelter he could expect that night, unless he could earn a few cents before the time of retiring.

He would have gone at once, for it was growing dark rapidly, but Bess urged him to remain and he could not refuse.

The womanly young girl saw that Jerry was making progress. Several times during the late interview he had asserted himself and cast off his apathy most decidedly. Bess was delighted. She knew that his stolidity was not natural, but the result of long-continued abuse and neglect, and she had labored hard in the past to effect a cure.

The result had been that his mood would flicker like a candle; he would rise momentarily to lightness of spirit, only to sink into the old rut immediately after.

Bess now hoped for better things.

Jerry remained at Attic 10 until nearly nine o'clock. Then he went away with a careless air, as though the occasion was unworthy of serious thought, but, once outside, he changed his ways.

"Got ter skirmish fur a bunk," he admitted. "Don't keer ter roost on a door-step, fur the perleece would whack me over the feet with a club, an' I won't go ter a station-house. Now, thar was some boxes down nigh the wharf yisterday—ef them pin't been took away, that's my chance. I'll see about it."

He was not long in reaching the place, and, once there, was pleased to find everything as it had been—a confused heap of both broken and intact boxes. If it had not been protected by its peculiar position, the fragments would long before have been carried away for kindling-wood by those living near.

To reach this haven of rest Jerry had both to avoid the watchman on the wharf and to crawl through a small opening between other things, but he arrived there at last.

Selecting the largest box, he crawled in and settled down with a feeling of satisfaction.

"I'm fixed fur the night, an' this ain't so very bad!" he muttered, aloud.

"Right you are, my hearty!"

The words were spoken near him, inside the box. He could see nothing, but it was clear that he had a neighbor in his lodging-house.

"I think i's bully!" added the Unknown.

"Who be you?" Jerry inquired, curiously.

"I'm traveling agent for Street & Walker."

"Don't know them."

"You will when you've walked the streets and road as long as I have—that's who Street & Walker are, my hearty!"

The invisible man chuckled as he spoke.

"Do you always live here?" asked Jerry, wondering if he was an intruder.

"No."

"Do yer object ter me bein' here?"

"Bless you, no! I'll be delighted to have company. Me object? Guess you can't see me."

"I can't."

"Thought not. Me object? Say, my hearty, I'm not clad in purple and fine linen. I'm forty years old, unshaven and unshorn, and my clothes are nothing but rags. My only virtue lies in the fact that I'm clean of person, if not of raiment."

"Then you're poor?"

"Poor?" chuckled the stranger. "My hearty, I'm a wart on the face of nature; I'm Toddles, the Tramp—that's my name."

"Are you a real tramp?"

"You bet! Want to join me?"

"No, I don't!" Jerry answered, decidedly.

"Good! Don't you do it, my hearty. It's a toothless chestnut to say that I come of a good family, but such is the fact. If I hadn't been a vagabond, I'd have been tolerably rich, but I was a good-for-nothing!"

The words fell upon Jerry's ears unpleasantly. People said that he was a good-for-nothing. Would he wind up by becoming a tramp?

"Never!" he thought.

He was silent so long that Toddles continued: "Hope you ain't too proud to bunk with me?"

"Not a bit!" declared Jerry. "I'm poor an' ragged, myself, an' couldn't afford ter be fastijjus ef I wanted ter."

"What's your name?"

"Jerry Higgs."

"Good name! Not so long as William Shakespeare, nor so musical as Toddles, but good for all practical purposes. What do you do for a living?"

"I've been a bootblack, but they burnt up my brush an' box, an' I ain't doin' nothin', now."

"Always lived in New York?"

"Yes."

"Got parents?"

"No; I'm all alone."

"A city gamin!" muttered Toddles, musingly. "Say, my hearty, I want to see you by daylight, when it comes. Maybe, I can give you a lift. I've been a tramp for many a year—sometimes a well-dressed, lucky, careless traveler, but, of late, a run-down, ragged vagabond—but

I'm going to get a move on me and brace. I know a family secret which ought to fill my pockets, and it shall when I get at old Reyburton."

"Who?"

"Reyburton."

"I've heard c' him. He an' the Hendersons quarreled."

"The blazes they did!" exclaimed Toddles, sharply and suspiciously. "See here, you young hound, are you a spy on me?"

CHAPTER VI.

AN ALARMING INTERRUPTION.

THE tramp's easy, jovial, friendly manner had given place to one of severity and menace, but Jerry did not feel frightened. He explained to Toddles that he had never seen one of the Reyburtons, and had merely met one of the female Hendersons casually.

Toddles insisted upon having more information.

Jerry was not the person to tell everything he knew, and he did not hesitate to abridge the account very decidedly. He explained that a certain Iovella Henderson had called upon a gentleman whom he knew, and that he had heard mention made of the family quarrel with the Reyburtons.

The tramp then asked many questions concerning Iovella. How did she look? How did she act? What did her disposition seem to be?

Jerry answered as well as he could, and that ended the conversation. Toddles relapsed into silence, to meditate, and then fell asleep.

His young companion was not long in following his example, but before he succumbed to slumber, he puzzled over four questions:

Why had the Jones family cast him off when he was their only means of support?

Why was Anthony Gray so careful of the old saddle, and so alarmed when any one else approached it?

What was the trouble between the Hendersons and the Reyburtons?

What was the secret which Toddles claimed to possess in regard to the rival families?

The boy fell asleep without getting any light, and rested peacefully in the big box. Truly, he was a football of fortune. Accustomed from his infancy to hardship, neglect and abuse, he was, at last, slumbering peacefully in that rude bed, side by side with a tramp.

The surroundings did not affect his rest; he slept soundly until morning.

When he awoke, Toddles was already sitting up in the big box.

"Well, my hearty, how is it?" the man asked.

"All correck."

"Bed suit you?"

"It did wal enough."

"Good! I quite like your nerve. Now, the next thing is to consider breakfast. What's your capital?"

"I ain't got a cent!"

"No? Bless me! you are hard up. Well, I'm not the man to let a bedfellow go hungry. I have just a fifty-cent piece, and we'll have a square feed. Let's crawl out and look for a hash-dispensary."

They left the box, managed to avoid the notice of those on the wharf, and reached the street. Then they visited a restaurant where low prices prevailed, and had a substantial breakfast.

"Now, my hearty," Toddles observed, "I hope I haven't seen the last of you. Shall we meet and sleep in the box again, to-night?"

"Yes."

"All right; I'll leave you now."

"I'll pay you fur this loan ter-night, ef I kin."

"Nonsense! I don't want a cent back."

"But I'm goin' ter pay ye."

"Well, well, we will see. Now I'm off."

The tramp extended his hand, and Jerry took it without hesitation. He liked the tramp. Ragged Toddles was, and his hair and beard were in a shocking state, but his big blue eyes were bright and merry, and his expression thoroughly good-humored. He had been a jolly, generous companion, free from the vicious ways of the average tramp. So Jerry bade him adieu with regret.

Left alone, the boy was uncertain what to do. He wanted to earn some money, but how was he to do it? He wandered eastward until he came to Broadway, and then paused. Busy men and busy boys were hurrying along, all earning something, but Jerry was out in the cold.

The big Stewart Building reared its top high in the air, on the opposite side of the street,

and, to Jerry, it appeared to stare at him in an unfeeling way, as though to say in pantomime: "You have no place here; you are a good-for-nothing. Go away!"

He did not long give way to such gloomy thoughts, for he had too much real courage to be overwhelmed by his misfortunes.

Remembering Brinsley Choate, he looked at the address on the young man's card. It was Fourteenth street, near Seventh avenue.

Choate had asked Jerry to call upon him, and the latter decided to do so at once. He had been offered assistance. If Choate would keep his promise to the extent of buying a bootblack's outfit, Jerry felt that he would be in clover, metaphorically speaking.

Brisk walking brought him to the desired locality a little before eleven o'clock.

Once there he began to have some doubts.

The block was one which had once been the home of families rich and aristocratic. Nearly all of these had gone, and boarding-houses predominated, but they were of a rather high-toned nature; the tall, brown-stone buildings were still imposing; an air of pompous respectability, if not of fashion, still clung to the fine locality, and Jerry had his doubts.

Would a ragged boy be received there?

He tried the experiment and succeeded better than he had dared to hope. After some skirmishing his name was taken to Choate, who promptly ordered the servant to bring him in.

The room was on the top floor, but was big and comfortable, when reached. Choate was not alone; an elderly gentleman, who somewhat resembled him, was seated in an easy-chair.

Brinsley arose, shook hands with Jerry, asked if he was in a hurry, and, being assured that such was not the case, asked him to sit down for a while.

The elderly gentleman had been looking at the boy with manifest curiosity.

"You're a strange fellow, Maurice!" he observed.

"Why so, sir?" Choate asked.

"Your tastes are abominable. You desert a luxurious home to live in the garret of a boarding-house, and now I ascertain that you are a chum of—well, to be plain, of a ragamuffin!"

"Remember that my family relatives are said to be eccentric, one and all!" laughed Brinsley.

"Eccentric we may be, but not low in our tastes. My grandfather and my father were both peculiar, but proud and exclusive. People say that I am the same, and, certainly, the family honor is dear to me. You are not like the Reyburtons!"

"I trust, sir, that I have never dishonored my family."

"I hope not, though"—here the speaker's manner grew stern—"I confess that I have had my doubts. Objectionable as this attic hobby is, and as your friends may be, I could forgive all these if I were sure that you were thoroughly loyal to the Reyburton family."

"Do you really doubt it?"

"I know that you do not hate the Hendersons as you ought, and I have, at times, suspected you of a desire to heal the quarrel. Let me tell you, Maurice Reyburton, that I would not tolerate that! I would sooner see you dead, if you are my son. This is serious, and you know what the word of Thomas Reyburton is!"

Sternly and severely spoke the man. Jerry gazed in astonishment. After all, it seemed that Choate's real name was Reyburton. What did it mean?

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Brinsley, lightly.

"Old Luther Henderson is as active as ever, and his young cousin, Lovella Henderson, is a fit ally. The girl is a wretched creature. She has somewhere met a low actor named Brinsley Choate, and finds him just equal to her taste. It is infamous, for her family, outrageously mean as they are, have aristocratic blood."

Mr. Reyburton, junior, looked embarrassed. It was plain that his father did not suspect that he was Brinsley Choate, and the old gentleman was trifling on delicate ground.

"Of all the Hendersons," Reyburton went on, "I hold this Lovella the worst. She's not bad-looking—I've seen her—but she is all that is mean. Maurice, my son, hold fast to your hatred of the Hendersons! While that Lovella lives, I would rather see you dead than to know that you had weakened in the family feud!"

The younger man flushed; his father's voice was full of bitter hatred and tremendous energy.

Just then a footstep sounded at the door, which was not closed, and—maliciousness of fate!—Lovella Henderson appeared in person!

"Why, Brinsley, you careless fellow!" she

cried, lightly, "have your wits gone wool-gathering? Where is the book you promised to send me?"

She stopped short, perceiving, for the first time, that Choate was not alone, but the mischief had been done. The name spoken by her, and her friendly, familiar manner, were alike a revelation.

Thomas Reyburton arose and glared first at Lovella and then at his son, his face convulsed and pale with fury.

"I see how it is!" he cried, sibilantly, "you are the Brinsley Choate whom this wretched woman fancies! And you—may my curse rest upon you!—you have proved false to the family feud and made love to the daughter of our enemy! By heaven! there shall be a tragic settlement of this offense!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE DECREE OF A MAN OF IRON.

It was a thrilling scene. Thomas Reyburton was almost maddened by his rage. His face was pallid; his eyes gleamed unnaturally; and his whole frame shook with the violence of his emotions.

Lovella was the picture of dismay, while Maurice, who had also risen, was pale but determined.

Jerry Higgs looked on in wonder and close attention, his sympathies all with his acquaintances.

"Father," answered Maurice, in a low but earnest voice, "do not let us have any ill-feeling here, I implore you."

"You say this to me—you dare to say this!" hissed Thomas Reyburton.

"Believe me, sir, I can explain—"

"Can you explain how you have dared to make love to a Henderson? Can you explain your relations to this wretched woman? I have heard that she was associating with a low actor named Brinsley Choate, but had never seen him. I understand now why you left your home for this garret. I can see that your predections for the stage have led you to adopt the life secretly. I can see that you have deceived me, made friends with a viper, and disgraced the name of Reyburton. But can you explain what this woman is to you?"

The speaker had grown more violent as he proceeded until his voice arose shrilly. Lovella was at the point of weeping, but Maurice faced the danger with manly fortitude.

"Father," he replied, temperately, "do not condemn us unheard. That I am acquainted with Miss Henderson is already plain. Chance threw us together, but she knew me first only as Brinsley Choate, and if any one is to blame, it is I. I knew, of course, who she was, but I concealed my identity from her until she knew me well. As for—"

"Why is she in the same house with you?"

"This house is that of a friend of hers. I came here to lodge before I ever saw Miss Henderson. She is, and always has been, a visitor to the lady of the house. That is why she is here now."

Still, his voice remained steady and firm, but his head was thrown back proudly as he spoke the next words.

"As for Miss Henderson, herself, I am deeply grieved that you should meet with disappointment, knowing, as I do, how you regard her family; but, father, this I must say: If you knew Miss Henderson as intimately and as truly as I do, you would change your opinion. She is a noble girl—"

"Enough!" interrupted Thomas Reyburton, harshly. "I have listened patiently, but your explanation must be over when you begin to analyze her character, and seek to convince me that the son is wiser than the father; that you know it all, while I am a driveling idiot."

"Pardon me, father, but you have no right or cause to assume that," Maurice returned, in respectful protest.

"How dare you dispute me?"

"I simply say that you are mistaken, sir. You have applied a severe term to yourself, while I have never failed to yield that respect to you that a son should give to his father."

"Rubbish! But this is not to the point; empty words neither prove nor disprove a charge. In this case there is tangible proof. It is there!"

He pointed to Lovella, bitter hatred expressed in every word, and in every varying expression of his stern, harsh face.

"Father!"

"Well, why don't you proceed?" sneered Reyburton.

Maurice glanced at pale, troubled Lovella. He loved her, and the affection was reciprocated.

Such being the case, he was prepared to defend her first, last and always, but he wished to make peace with his father, and felt that the task was hopeless.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, sir."

"No doubt."

"But, if you will only consent to become well acquainted with Miss Henderson—"

"I?" retorted the elder man, and his stubborn gray hair appeared to bristle with rage. "Never! I will die first!"

"You are proceeding from a wrong point of view," asserted Maurice, pride and firmness asserting themselves within him the moment that Lovella was attacked. "You have seen Miss Henderson in the past, but not enough to become acquainted; you never exchanged twenty words with her in your life. I know her well; I knew her well before she even suspected that I was a Reyburton, and I had a chance to learn that she was a noble girl. I ask your indulgence, sir, until you hear me through."

"Go on!"

Short and harsh was the reply; no one could see any hope in Reyburton's manner.

Maurice felt that he had a good deal to say, but, somehow, his flow of speech was not equal to his eager desires.

"I am aware, father, that I went contrary to your teachings in this matter, but, when I first met Miss Henderson, she was wholly ignorant of my identity, masked by the name of Brinsley Choate, as it was; and I went into the acquaintance with curiosity to see what one of the condemned Hendersons was like in private life."

"Proceed!"

"I have learned to honor her as a true woman. And, sir, she has never borne ill-will toward our family. She has not believed in the family quarrel; she has not considered the Reyburtons any more than other men and women; and has wished that the old feud might be buried."

Thus far Lovella had remained silent. At first she had been utterly overwhelmed with dismay, for Maurice's sake, but desire to make peace between father and son had conquered every weakness.

She now moved forward.

"Mr. Reyburton," she began, respectfully and persuasively, "your son has spoken truly. I am not in sympathy with the Henderson hatred of your family. The quarrel began long ago, and I, for one, have no wish to keep it up—"

"Why not?"

"I see no good reason why I should hate your family, sir."

"What did your father teach you?"

"He was governed by the old-time bitterness—"

"Did he teach you to hate the Reyburtons?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Then you are worthy of the respect of neither the Reyburtons nor the Hendersons!" and pronouncing this harsh verdict, the speaker turned to Maurice.

"Once more I ask you," he added, "what are your relations with this woman?"

The unceremonious rebuff of Lovella fired Maurice's blood.

"This lady," he replied, proudly but temperately, "is my promised wife!"

Thomas Reyburton stood in silence. The violence of his rage had exhausted itself, but his heart had not softened, and the signs of his bitter disappointment and enmity were not less marked to the gaze.

His face had a strange gray pallor, and his eyes a glitter which was ominous and alarming.

"I suspected as much," he answered. "Now hear me: I command you to cast her off, and never to see her again!"

"Father, I have always yielded you respect and obedience, but, in this matter, I cannot conform to your wishes. If you knew Miss Henderson well, you would not ask it. Why should we keep up the feud our ancestors began?"

"It was my father who first felt the fiendish ill-will of the Hendersons. I honor him, however you may regard filial duty."

"But time changes all things."

"It does not change a true Reyburton's regard for the family honor!"

"But Miss Henderson is not responsible for what her grandfather may have done."

"I have heard her renounce the family quarrel. She may, or may not, have been sincere—"

"I was sincere!" Lovella interrupted, eagerly.

"Then I despise you all the more. It is bad enough to be a Henderson, but to renounce their cause is a sin unpardonable!"

Before any one could find words to meet this illogical argument, the speaker went on in an inexorable voice:

"For the last time, will you give up this wretched woman?"

"Pardon me, sir, but I cannot do it."

"Enough!"

Thomas Reyburton turned, picked up his hat and walked to the door. Then he faced his son again.

"I will give you three days of grace," he continued. "We are not always prepared to cast off evil at a moment's warning, when reasonable meditation may cause us to do so. If, at the expiration of three days, you come to me and offer to abandon this madness forever, I will take you back as my son."

He paused, and then his face grew hard as he unwaveringly resumed:

"Unless you do this, you and I are done forever. Never while I live will I be a friend to the Hendersons; never will I tolerate acquaintance between their tribe and my honorable family!"

"But, father—"

"Two paths lie before you, Maurice Reyburton. If you go the one, you remain to me as you have been in the past; if you choose the other, you and I are strangers from this day. I will make a will which shall disinherit you forever, and my only marriage gift to you shall be my curse!"

He moved backward another step.

"Yes," he added, in a deep voice, "if you choose to keep this woman's company, may my curse rest upon you both, forever!"

And then he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

JERRY MEETS WITH MORE HARD LUCK.

Not until the street door was heard to close behind Thomas Reyburton, was the silence broken. Maurice and Iovella had been looking at each other in silent dismay.

Then she burst into tears and sunk into a chair.

"Ruined!—ruined!" she gasped.

"No, no!" Maurice cried; "I will stand between you and all harm."

"It is not of myself that I think; it is of you!"

"Of me? I am strong enough to face the storm."

"But I have alienated you and your father."

"Was it your fault?"

"I am a Henderson!"

"And the noblest of women!"

"But your father cannot be convinced."

"His views may change—"

Maurice did not finish the sentence. Knowing Thomas Reyburton as he did, he felt that he might as well look to see the waters of the Hudson River flow northward in their channel as to see that iron will break.

He stood near Iovella, who sat with her head bowed upon her hands, when Jerry Higgs moved forward.

"Scuse me!" he observed, "but I guess as how I'm in the way."

Maurice started. He had wholly forgotten the boy. He had the natural instinct of a gentleman, and the wait's low, considerate voice did not fail to make an impression.

"My good youth," he answered, "we are in distress now, as you have seen. Thank you for your delicacy. If you will excuse me for the present, you may go; but I want to see you again. Come to-morrow, without fail! Will you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; don't forget."

"Thank'ee, sir."

Jerry went out. When it was too late a new thought entered Maurice's perturbed mind:

"Perhaps the boy is in need! Why didn't I think to give him a dollar?"

It was not strange that he had forgotten, when he was in so much trouble, but his course, pardonable as it was, had left the ex-bootblack as poor as when he came to the house.

Jerry had not a penny in his pocket, and noon was close at hand.

But it was not of his empty stomach that the Football of Fortune thought.

"I feel sorry fur them, by Jiminy!" he murmured, soberly. "They're all broke up, an' I reckon the ol' gentleman won't change his mind an' artom. Ef he casts Maurice off, I hope he won't be so poor that he'll fall as low as me an' Toddles, the Tramp! Him an' she is both prime folks, an' it's mean they should hev sech luck. I ought ter be thankful I ain't so broke up an' threatened with trouble!"

It was a sincere remark. Good-for-Nothing Jerry he might be, and minus money and work he certainly was, but the same self-sacrificing and noble spirit which had led him to give money to the Saddle-Rider and his daughter without a hope of return, now prompted him to think far more of Maurice and Iovella than of his own wretched lot.

"They was good ter me, an' they spoke kind," he added. "I wish I could help 'em!"

Meditating thus, he walked on mechanically, heedless of his course. Turning down Sixth avenue he had gone south, following the car-track, and thus was brought to Canal street, finally.

Sight of this busy, but by no means inviting street, awoke him to practical interest in himself.

It was past noon, and he had neither dinner nor the means of purchasing it.

"Guess I've got ter skirmish, now!" he soliloquized. "Grub don't grow on shade-trees, an' restaurants ain't free. See them dusty shoes agoin' past with men inter them! Ef I only had my brush an' box, I'd earn my dinner right quick!"

Unfortunately, his implements of trade were in ashes, and the problem still remained—how was he to get a dinner?

He had a pair of willing hands, and he called at several stores and shops, and inquired if there was any job he could do to earn a few cents. Invariably receiving a negative reply, he found himself in the same dilemma at one o'clock that he was an hour before—and with an appetite even stronger.

Two hours more passed without any turn of the tide, though he had continued his applications for work.

By the middle of the afternoon he was decidedly hungry. It troubled him far less than it would a boy reared in luxury, and his courage never wavered, but he did not enjoy the situation.

He was without dinner and without home among hundreds of thousands of fellow-beings, and with many a floor bending under its weight of food.

His wandering feet had taken him to the corner of Park Row and Frankfort streets, and he was standing there in a mood of grim fortitude when he saw a derby hat whisk out into the street. The corner was one noted for high winds when there was a wind anywhere around, and the breeze had neatly uncovered somebody's head.

Jerry made a dive under the nose of a horse attached to a passing team, snatched the hat out from under the forward platform of a street-car which threatened it with instant destruction, and then bore it back to the sidewalk.

He was met by a gentleman whose face bore the unnatural smile peculiar to a man hatless on the street.

"Thank you, boy!" he exclaimed, heartily.

"You run the gantlet in good shape. Here's something for your trouble."

The next moment he was moving away, but he had left a bright coin in Jerry's hands. It was a ten-cent piece.

How the situation changed! Dinner loomed up in the near distance as big as a house, metaphorically if not literally, and Jerry hastened toward a cheap eating-house of which he knew. He never saw the donor of the coin again, but it was long before he forgot him.

Entering the restaurant, he sat down at one of the bare tables. There was nothing visible in the way of style at that place.

"Hello, my hearty!"

It was a hearty voice just in front of Jerry, and he looked up and saw Toddles, the Tramp. He had, by chance, sat down at the same table with his bedfellow of the previous night.

"How's thi'gs?" the ragged man added.

"Pooty fair."

"You eat late."

"I eat when I hev money," Jerry explained, with his usual practical view of matters.

"Made a raise?"

"Ten cents."

"I'll add another dime, and do you fill up your crap until you can't peep above a whisper."

The boy protested, but Toddles was firm, and a twenty-cent dinner was soon steaming in front of the football of fortune. Toddles had finished just previously. Jerry was glad to see him, and for other reasons than because he had added to the dinner. The tramp was as good humored as ever, and his bright blue eyes were pleasant to look at.

"How is biz?" Toddles asked.

"Poor!" Jerry answered, with a full mouth.

"Booked for a nap in the dry-goods case, to-night, with me?"

"I shall be glad ter, Mr. Toddles."

"Wish we could engage that box for the season," observed Mr. Toddles, meditatively. "There's just room for us two, and the locality is charming. The North River would wink and twinkle at us all night, and the water would cool the air. Can't say as much for the smells. Do you know of any disinfectant that will eliminate and subdue twenty distinct and malodorous effluvia?"

Jerry stopped eating and gazed with open mouth at the man who recklessly used such long words.

"Hey?" he replied.

The tramp laughed merrily.

"In plain words, we ought to have the smells done away with, before hiring the box for the season."

"Ef we kin hire the box, I'll go in with ye, as soon as I git some money."

"All right; we'll consider it. As agreed upon this morning, we'll sleep there to-night. After that we will see. I want to see a certain man to-morrow; I may make a raise."

"Is it Thomas Reyburton?"

Toddles scowled.

"What's that?" he demanded.

Jerry boldly repeated the question.

"What do you know about Thomas Reyburton? Or what do I know?" demanded the tramp.

"You mentioned some Reyburton, last night."

"Did I say 'Thomas'?"

"No."

"Just so; I simply said, 'old Reyburton.' You're too greedy to snap up flies; look out that you don't swallow a barbed hook!"

It was a stern reproof, and Higgs relapsed into silence; but, after a brief pause, Toddles suddenly broke out again.

"Say, are we partners?" he demanded.

"I should like it."

"With a tramp?"

"You don't seem like a tramp."

"I am, every inch; but this I will say for your benefit, young man: I am not like most tramps. Ninety-nine out of every hundred of them are reckless, dishonest, evil and thoroughly unscrupulous, and many are actual criminals. These men would cut your throat for ten dollars; never mix with them. I am lazy and ragged, but I swear to you that I never did harm to any man or woman, disreputable as I am to look at!"

Toddles spoke with evidence of deep feeling, and his merry blue eyes were very grave for the time being, but his lighter nature at once came to the surface again.

"Yes, we're partners, and I don't know why I should be so close-mouthed. Thomas Reyburton is the man I mean, and the one I rely upon to fill my purse."

"You said you had a secret o' his'n."

"So I have, and I mean to make it good for solid money. Don't class me as a blackmailer, for I claim to be above that. Now, what do you know about Thomas Reyburton?"

"He's mad as a hornet 'cause his son wants ter marry Iovella Henderson."

Toddles opened his eyes wide in surprise.

"A Reyburton marry a Henderson!" he exclaimed.

"That's w'ot the young folks mean ter do."

"Old Thomas will tear his suspender-buttons off!"

"He can't help hisself."

"Tell me all about it, my hearty!"

Jerry Higgs was not a boy who went around telling all that he knew, but something now impelled him to confide in Toddles. He told enough to make the situation clear to his companion.

Toddles listened attentively, had a long period of meditation, and then broke into a merry chuckle.

"Whoop her up, Eliza Jane!" he ejaculated. "I foresee fun ahead, and, as sure as my name is Toddles, the Tramp, I shall come in as one of the funny whoopers!"

CHAPTER IX.

DRAWN REVOLVERS.

JERRY and his new friend soon left the restaurant.

"I'm off, now!" Toddles announced.

"On business?"

"Yes; I'm looking around."

"Seein' the city?"

"Seeing some of its people."

With this non-committal reply the tramp took out a twenty-five cent coin.

"Take this to defray your expenses until night," he added.

"You can't afford it!" Jerry protested.

"Why not?"

"You said you had only half a dollar, this mornin', an' you've paid out—"

"Rest easy. I've made a slight raise since, and made it at billiards. Two fellows—gamblers, I presume—were playing in a low room. One got laid out, and was mad. I told him I could beat the victor. He said that if I would do it, he would give me two dollars. We played, and I won. When I was a well-dressed wanderer, instead of a ragged tramp, I learned the art well, and I just tore this fellow all to pieces, as the saying goes. But this is not to the point. Keep the quarter. Do we meet and sleep in the box, to-night?"

"I shall be glad ter."

"All right; it's a go. So-long!"

Toddles gave Jerry's hand a hearty pressure, and went his way.

He left the boy in good spirits. With twenty-five cents in his pocket the world looked more cheerful than it had done before. He began to dream of having a bootblack's outfit again; but other dreams crowded these hopes. Maurice Reyburton had promised to help him, and, if he could get a more promising chance, he thought it would be well to abandon his old calling.

Since being cast off by the Jones family, his inward self had undergone even more change than the outer one. Rising out of the stolid mood resulting from neglect and abuse, he began to have plans and ambitions which almost startled him.

"I wish I could be somebody!"

He put the ambition into words earnestly, and then looked at a group of elderly, well-dressed, gray-haired, substantial-looking gentlemen near him.

"They call me Good-for-Nothing Jerry," he added, "but I wish I was like them!"

The idea was born, not of envy or indolence, but of ambition. He felt willing to work hard for years, but, as a reward, wished to rise above the low, ignorant and commonplace of mankind.

Not having anything else to do, and knowing that Bess Gray would be anxious about him, the boy made his way up-town as far as her humble home. Attic 10 had not undergone any change, and he was soon inside the room. To his disappointment, Bess was not present, Anthony Gray being the only occupant of the room. As usual, he was sitting upon the old saddle.

The old gentleman was always kind to Jerry, as he was to every one. True, he had never seemed to appreciate at its real value the boy's generosity in "loaning" him money; but, after a fashion, he was grateful.

"Well, Jerry, how is the bootblack business?" he asked, with some show of eagerness.

"I ain't a bootblack no more, Mr. Gray. Don't yer remember I tol' ye I'd got done?"

"Dear me! I believe I do remember it!"

The Saddle-Rider's face had clouded very perceptibly. His weakened mind did not allow him to be so very sorry for Jerry, but he realized one unpleasant fact.

"I shall git suthin' else right soon, Mr. Gray."

"I hope so, for—we haven't—much money."

Deep would have been Bess's mortification had she heard the words, and even Gray flushed slightly. If he had been his old-time self he would have been most reluctant to take Jerry's hard-earned money, but, now, he was anxious to get it, though still capable of shame.

"You might sell the ol' saddle," Jerry suggested plainly.

"Mr. 'Jumbletop' looked startled.

"Sell the saddle? Never!" he exclaimed.

"What's the good on't ter you?"

"I sit on it."

"So I see, but w'ot's the matter wi' the chairs?"

"Boy, I shall never part with this saddle!" declared Gray, firmly.

Jerry did not feel inclined to let the matter drop. Contrary to the usual rule, the old gentleman did not seem suspicious, frightened and worried in any great degree. The ex-bootblack would not have annoyed him maliciously, but he did want to know the secret of the old saddle.

"Why d'ye think it so vallerble?" he asked.

"This is not an ordinary work."

"Looks ter be."

"It is made like all saddles, but—well, there is more to it. If I were to tell you all about it, you would be surprised. There are mysteries

in this world, my lad, and there's one about this article."

"Money in it?"

"Not a cent."

"Can't imagine w'ot 'tis, then."

Mr. Jumbletop chuckled.

"Nobody knows the secret but me!" he asserted.

"Can't ye sell the secret?"

"Sell it!" cried the old gentleman, indignantly. "I would starve, first! There are those who would pay a good price for it, though."

"Think how poor ye be," Jerry suggested.

"Poor I may be, but my honor is left. No; the secret shall never be told—unless the grave gives up its dead!"

The last words were spoken in a low, thoughtful, absent way.

"I wish you'd tell me the secret."

"What secret?"

"That about the ol' saddle."

"Never!" exclaimed Gray, with a start; and his old, suspicious manner suddenly returned. "Why do you quiz me about this matter? I have always used you well, received you kindly, fed and clothed you— No; that is not right. I mean that I thank you for your loans, and will repay you, some day. Yes, yes! Don't worry about your pay, Jerry; it'll be all right!"

Jerry saw that the Saddle-Rider's mind was in a condition far more confused than usual. Gray pressed his hand wearily to his head, and, moved to fresh pity, the boy not only reassured him on the last point, to which he had wandered so erratically, but let the other matter drop.

At the same time, the ex-bootblack could not help wondering what was the secret of the saddle—for that it was one, and not a vagary of Gray's mind, he felt confident.

A few minutes later, as Anthony was crossing the room after getting a drink of water, a knock sounded at the door.

He opened it, and saw two rough-looking men.

"Excuse me," said one, "but is this Anthony Gray?"

"That is my name, sir."

"The basket-maker?"

"Yes, yes! Won't you walk in?"

The Saddle-Rider believed that he scented an order for work, and his manner was eager. They entered, and took the chairs placed for them.

If he was pleased, young Higgs was not. In his opinion the men were both disreputable and evil of appearance, and, from the first, they gazed at him in a strange, critical and pertinaacious way.

"Can I sell you some baskets?" asked Gray.

"We will see, later. We are here for information. If you can give it, I think we may then promise you a handsome order for baskets. Can you tell us the whereabouts of a boy named Jerry Higgs?"

While asking the question, the evil-looking speaker gazed, not at Anthony, but at the boy.

"Why, there's Jerry!" declared the basket-maker, pointing as he spoke.

"I suspected it!"

Tersely making this assertion, the man nodded to his fellow-visitor, who arose and locked the door.

Jerry leaped to his feet, foreseeing trouble, but, like a flash, the stranger drew two revolvers and turned one upon each of the previous occupants of the room.

"Be still!" he commanded. "If you dare to utter a cry for help, I will shoot you down!"

Anthony Gray uttered a shrill cry of terror.

"Have you come for the saddle?" he almost yelled.

"Saddle be hanged! We've come for that boy, and we are going to take him, dead or alive!"

CHAPTER X.

ONLY A PIECE OF WIRE.

This declaration filled Jerry Higgs with unbounded surprise. He had never considered himself to be of any particular importance in the world, anyhow, and why any one should take all this trouble with him he could not conceive.

There was a momentary lull.

Jerry stood erect, more of surprise than alarm being pictured on his face.

Anthony Gray was completely demoralized, fear and bewilderment struggling in his mind.

The leader of the two evil-looking intruders was the central figure, and the revolvers in his hands did not waver. One covered Gray; the other presented a yawning muzzle to the ex-bootblack.

Intruder Number Two was at his leader's elbow.

The Football of Fortune was the first to regain speech.

"W'ot's all this rubbish?" he demanded, sharply.

"You won't find any rubbish about it," the revolver-wielder replied. "You're our prisoner!"

"Don't b'lieve I fully ketch on."

"You are to go away with us."

"Whar?"

"That's our business."

"But I can't see w'ot yer want o me!" Jerry asserted, wonderingly.

"It ain't necessary that you should, and we will spend no time over it. All you have to do is to go with us. If you go quietly, all well and good, but go you shall, if we have to drag you out. It is in your power to yell, and try to call help, but I warn you that I shall shoot you, if you do. We can take you just as well dead, and you'll be a heap quieter!"

This atrocious declaration was made in a business kind of way, as though it was the most matter-of-fact thing in the world.

Anthony Gray was appalled. Weak as he was mentally, he realized that the intruders were merciless ruffians, and the revolver filled him with shivers and tremors which chased each other up and down his person.

It was a great relief to him to learn that it was not the old saddle, but Jerry that they wanted, but he felt great pity for the ex-bootblack.

As for Jerry, his face suddenly flushed and his eyes sparkled.

"See here!" he cried; "d'ye think you kin make this work?"

"We know we can."

"'Merican citizens ain't ter be sarved so."

"Do you mean that you won't go peaceably?"

"That's jest w'ot I do mean!"

"Then we'll take you!"

The speaker advanced a step, but Jerry caught up a stick and swung it aloft for a club.

"Keep back, or I'll rap ye!" he exclaimed.

"Jack!" called the man with the revolvers.

"Ay!" was the response.

"Go forward and tie up that young braggart. If he tries to resist, I'll shoot him!"

"All right."

Jack immediately produced a long, stout cord from his pocket, and advanced upon the intended victim. Once more Jerry gave a warning, and he stood braced for the attack, determined not to yield without a struggle. The club caused Jack to hesitate.

"Blame you, drop that!" he growled.

"I'll drop it on your head, ef ye te'ches me!"

Jerry retorted, unwaveringly.

"Go in, Jack!" urged villain Number One.

"I'll shoot him if he resists."

Jack made a sudden rush, trying to avoid a blow, but luck was against him. Down came the club, sped with all the strength of the ex-bootblack's arms, and the ruffian tumbled over upon the floor.

Number One uttered a furious exclamation. He had never intended to use the revolver, fearing the result of a report; it had been his game to frighten the boy, and the game had failed signally.

Hastily pocketing the revolver, he sprung toward Jerry. Up went the club again, and another blow was aimed, but the fallen assailant, without rising, made a forward lunge and seized the boy by the ankle.

This spoiled Jerry's aim, and the club fell without effect. Another moment and he was in the grasp of his enemies.

After that the result was not in doubt. Anthony Gray stood like one dazed, and Jerry was no match for two strong men. He was soon overpowered and bound with the cord, his legs being left free.

"You've had your pains for nothing!" sneered the leader of the ruffians.

"I have got pains, too!" groaned Jack. "The young cub hit like a fiend. Let me at him, Baker!"

He would have struck the prisoner, but Baker interfered.

"We want to get out of here on the jump," he added. "Boy, you are to go with us. Nobody intends to hurt you if you behave well, but as it's a State's Prison job with us if we get caught, we are going to play you right down to hard-pan. We are in for sheep or lambs, and if you squeal when we're taking you out, I swear that we'll knife you!"

He turned to Gray, and added:

"Old gent, we shall leave you here, locking the door on the outside and leaving the key in the door. If you raise your bazoo, we'll come back and do you up for three months in the hospital!"

The threat was made in a manner so ferocious that the Saddle-Rider was seized with a pitiable trembling, and could not even reply.

Jerry was hustled toward the door. He did not resist, but plans were ready in his mind. He did not see how he was to be taken away in broad daylight, and he determined to defy the abductors as soon as they were out of the house.

Leaving Attic 10, they locked the door behind them and went down the several flights of stairs. No one was seen on the way.

When they reached the outside door a man came in. Jerry was about to appeal to him, but he suddenly said, "All right!" and then a coat was flung over the prisoner's head, he was lifted bodily and carried out.

He struggled manfully, but all to no purpose. He was bundled into a cab; Baker and Jack followed, and then the third man sprung to the box and the vehicle rolled away.

The last bold move had been made at just the right moment, and no honest person had seen the affair.

Three persons naturally crowded the cab, and Jerry was jammed back into one corner, with a revolver pressed against his temple.

"Be still, or I fire!" harshly declared Baker. The Football of Fortune was in for it, and he decided to take matters as coolly as possible. He could not imagine why any one should want to kidnap him, but it had been done, and he was likely to know the motive some time.

Away went the cab, turning several corners at a speed which caused the patrolmen to look at it with the half-formed intention of interfering, but not quite recklessly enough to bring about that result. Their course was toward the east, and they soon reached Elm street. There they drove into a narrow, dark alley, and finally brought up in a building of unprepossessing appearance.

Jerry was dragged out, and he saw that they were in an ill-kept stable of considerable size. When the door had been closed he seemed to be shut in from the whole world.

He was taken through a door at one side, and then found himself in a house of decent appearance. He was at once taken up-stairs to a large room, the windows of which were not only covered with wire netting, but crossed with several iron bars.

"Here you are!" Baker announced, with an air of relief.

"Wot ye goin' ter do with me?" Jerry asked. "Leave you here."

"What for?" "Never mind. Here you are to stay—be satisfied with that."

"But I ain't; I want ter know why I'm took away an' shut up? What've I done ter anybody?"

"Boy, don't try to know too much. Adam and Eve tried that racket, and you may have heard how they came out. Be satisfied while you're alive, and don't run the risk of getting snarled up with the legs of an earthquake. You are to remain here. If you stay quietly, and mind your own business, you won't have any trouble, but, if you kick up any dust, we shall come in here and silence you. Look out for yourself!"

The men had been preparing to go, and they now took their departure.

Jerry was locked in and left alone.

"Jiminy!" he commented; "this beats the record. Stole as though I was the son o' rich parients; abductioned right in the daytime in New York; an' now shut up like a pris'n'r in Sing Sing! What in the world did they do it for? Folks call me Good-for-Nothin' Jerry, an' I hev reckoned they're about right; so why should these men want me so bad?"

The ex-bootblack meditated on this point for some time with profound gravity, but ended by shaking his curly head.

"Can't see inter it!" he admitted. "It's mighty odd!"

Not being able to get any light, his thoughts finally took a new turn.

"Say," he muttered, "I've got ter git out o' here. 'Twas mean fur them scamps ter snake me away as they did, an' I don't like these quarters, nohow. I could stan' it, though, ef it wa'n't fur disa'p'intin' Toddles. He'll expeck me down on the wharf ter sleep with him in the box, an' I hate ter break an engagement. Then thar's Bess—she'll be skeered clear out o' her shoes when she hears o' my dissolv'in' away from view in sech a way."

This, to his mind, was the most serious thing of all, and he smote himself heavily on the knee.

"By Jiminy! I've got ter get out o' this!" he declared. "I wouldn't be the cause o' Bess's worryin' fur all o' New York. I'll git out or bust!"

There was but little sign left of the stolid Jerry Higgs of old in the bright-eyed boy who made this assertion so emphatically; he was thoroughly aroused, at last.

He surveyed his prison. The single door was not only locked, but firm, while the bars on the window were not to be removed with anything at his service. However, the wire netting—put on, no doubt, so that the neighbors could not see in—gave him an idea.

Once, during his career as a bootblack, he had seen several boys have a detached lock, the bolt of which they were trying to move with pieces of wire. He had observed that the task was difficult, but not impossible.

Could he unlock his prison-door in that way?

With the idea formed he was not long in making the experiment. First, he had to get the wire. This was not easy, but he wrenched a leg out of one of the rickety chairs, and with this pried off enough of the wire to suit his purpose.

It proved to be strong and new—just what he wanted.

With this he attacked the lock. The clicking which he made annoyed him not a little, for he was afraid it would betray him, but he was not disposed to wait until night.

The substitute for a key did not work in a promising manner. It rattled around in the key-hole, now catching on some point and then slipping off, but there was no indication that the bolt intended to move.

"I'll do it, ef it takes all night!" he muttered, resolutely. "I want ter git out, an', by jinks, I will!"

CHAPTER XI.

JERRY HEARS STRANGE NEWS.

CLICK!

Luck is like a dog which follows a man all through his life, but is not always at his heels. Luck is fickle. Now it serves one well; anon it serves him ill. Now it answers his call when he requires help; then it leaves him in the lurch when most sorely needed.

Luck was with Jerry Higgs on this eventful occasion, and, just when he expected it least, the bolt slipped back with a *click!* which was music to his ears.

He tried the door; it opened without resistance.

Hope arose strongly in his breast, and he lost no time in improving the chance thus offered. He stepped into the hall and walked softly toward the stairs. Down these he went without being molested, but the sound of voices showed that that the house was not deserted.

The conversation came from a room at one side. Jerry must pass the half-open door in order to escape. He went on, but, reaching that point, glanced in.

He saw two men seated at a roll-top desk, which was then open. Neither man was a stranger. One was Baker; the other—Jerry recognized him with surprise—was John Joy, the detective who had been hired to burn the warrant for Lovella's arrest.

This precious pair sat with their backs toward the door, and quite near each other. There was just space enough between them so the ex-bootblack could see that Baker was holding a small package of papers in his hand. He spoke, and his words fell with marked effect upon the boy's ears:

"These documents relate to the Reyburton secret, and prove that old Thomas has no right to the greater part of the property which he holds!"

Jerry's eyes dilated. He had become thoroughly interested in the Reyburton case, and the news was startling.

John Joy heard the assertion more composedly.

"Is the proof positive?" he asked, slowly.

"The assertion is here," Baker amended.

"If it be reliable, I will pay you handsomely for the papers."

Baker leaned back in his chair.

"Let us go slowly," he answered. "I am Thomas Reyburton's agent, and have served him well. As I told you before, I have kidnapped Jerry Higgs by Thomas's orders and shut him up in a secure place—where, I need not state."

"All this is very well, but I am not satisfied with the small sums I get from old Reyburton."

Like you, I want to get rich at a bound. Such being the case, and knowing the old man will pay well to preserve the secret, I will not sell you the papers, but will go into partnership with you.

"Of course it can't be equal shares, for I furnish the papers and the secret, and you only put in your knowledge of law and your cunning, but you shall have a fair show if you do the diplomatic work."

"How is it?—shall we 'bleed' old Reyburton together?"

This long speech was made persuasively, showing a desire on Baker's part to effect the alliance. John Joy was not so anxious, and it took some argument to win him over. He only yielded when he saw that Baker was determined to be in the game; then a compact was duly made.

Before they had finished talking something had happened which would have interested them had they known of it.

Eager to hear all that was to be learned concerning the Reyburtons, Jerry Higgs had crept into the room and ensconced himself behind a fire-screen which stood just where he wanted it.

He was in a position to overhear all that was said, though what become of him afterward was an unsolved question not so satisfactory.

"A crisis is approaching in the family affairs of the Reyburtons," continued Baker, as he untied the package of papers, "and it will be a crash when it occurs. Old Thomas has no more right to the property than I have, and he knows it. The very name of Jerry Higgs will make his hair bristle with fear and hostility!"

Jerry's eyes opened widely. Why in the name of all that was mysterious should Thomas Reyburton be afraid of him?

"The old man would be left about the same as a beggar, if he lost his ill-gotten property," pursued Baker. "Maurice has less cause for apprehension, for he has a cool fifty thousand which he inherited from his mother. Of course, though, Maurice does not know of the family secret."

"Can't we 'bleed' Maurice, too?" asked Joy. "We can try."

Baker selected one of the papers, and having asked his companion to give close attention, read aloud as follows:

"TO THE PUBLIC:—I, Catherine Bartley, being seized of a mortal complaint, which I cannot long resist, have to-day made oath before a magistrate to certain facts concerning the Reyburton family, which will be found fully recorded in a paper which accompanies this. I write this with my own hand, the magistrate being gone, to say that I hope no Reyburton will blame me for what I have done. I had justice and duty in my mind, merely, when I made that true statement, declaring that Thomas Reyburton was not, by right the possessor of the family wealth. Having been many years in the service of the Reyburtons, their honor is as dear to me as to any one else, and I wish all to believe that my motives were of the best when I made known the facts concerning the true heir. My sworn statement accompanies this."

"CATHERINE BARTLEY."

Baker refolded the paper. "Mrs. Bartley," he resumed, "was housekeeper for the Reyburtons. This is in her writing, and you can see that she was an intelligent woman."

"Well, now for the sworn confession."

"It is not here."

"Not here?"

"No."

"Where is it?"

"That's what I don't know."

"Explain!"

"This package of papers is all that I have, and the confession—I should say statement, rather, though I do not know its nature—is not one of them. Where it has gone I have no means of knowing. The other papers here are of minor importance. Some corroborative evidence may, or may not, be gleaned from them, but it is of no value."

"Then how are we to prove our claim?" Joy asked, gloomily.

"If we were seeking to put the real heir in possession we could not prove it, perhaps, but that is not to the point; we know who the real heir is, but wish to keep him out. What we want is to let Thomas Reyburton see that we are aware of his illegal holding of the property, and force him to pay for our silence."

"True!"

"We have proof enough for that."

"Are you sure that the boy—Higgs, if that's the name he is known by—has no papers?"

"I think he hasn't."

"Then we have the game in our own hands?"

"Absolutely."

"It would break Reyburton's heart to lose the money, after all he has done, first and last, to spite the Hendersons. Another, younger, Reyburton might not possess the same vindictive spirit."

"Very likely not."

Baker replaced the papers in the desk, locked it and put the key in his pocket.

"Well, it's a go, then?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Then old Reyburton shall fill our pockets with the cash we so much adore!"

Both men left the room and the house. When the front door closed behind them Jerry Higgs arose from his place of concealment.

"Jiminy! that's mighty queer!" he commented. "I don't more than half understand it, but one thing is sure—they're up ter rascality. Wish I could beat 'em out!"

He glanced toward the desk. According to his understanding of the affair, their most important proofs were the papers he had just seen locked up.

"I don't like Thomas Reyburton," the ex-bootblack continued, "but he's Maurice's father, an' Maurice is good! Besides, he's promised ter help me. How kin I better deserve help than by givin' him a lift?"

He walked to the desk and examined it. Both lock and desk, itself, seemed unusually firm.

"Baker must 'a' been off when he said Thomas Reyburton was afeerd o' me. Why should he be? Baker said it was Reyburton who hired him ter shut me up here. I don't b'lieve it! What cause fur shuttin' me up could the ol' gentleman hev?—or anybody else?"

The argument had led Jerry into deep waters. Plainly, some one had a motive, for he certainly had been shut up.

"Then Joy asked ef I had any o' the papers! What papers should I hev?"

More than ever bewildered, he abandoned the unavailing inquiry and once more turned his gaze upon the desk. Honest to a degree, he was confronted with an important question: Would he be justified in securing the valuable papers while he could?

He thought of Maurice, and his decision was soon made. In his opinion Maurice would not see injustice done to any one; it would be safe to give him the papers, even though they might work against him.

He determined to force open the desk.

It was not hard to find something with which to accomplish this result, and it was soon done. His hand closed upon the papers, and he thrust them away in his pocket.

It did not occur to him that he was laying himself liable to arrest. No one had ever expounded law to him; no teacher or parent had ever given him lessons in the subtler affairs of human conduct. Believing that he was serving a good end, his conscience was easy.

The next thing was to escape from the house.

CHAPTER XII.

A SUSPICIOUS SCENE ON A YACHT.

EVEN as Jerry considered this very important matter footsteps sounded in the hall, and he again retreated behind the fire-screen. A female servant appeared. His position was not one of the safest, and he expected discovery.

Fortunately, she passed on to the further end of the room, and then he arose and glided away, his bare feet making no audible sound. He was soon at the front door; opening it he passed out.

Once more he was on the street, and enjoying freedom. He did not intend to be captured again, but took care to get away without delay.

Believing that his first step should be to deliver the papers to Maurice Reyburton, he started up-town. On the way he stopped and informed Bess—who was in a panic—that he was safe, but delayed telling his story in detail until the next day.

After leaving Attie 10, it did not take him long to reach Fourteenth street, but when he arrived Maurice was out.

There seemed no way except to postpone this matter, also, for it was eight o'clock, so he went to a restaurant, had supper, and then returned to the lower part of the city. He was tired and sleepy, and consequently felt a good deal of interest in his lodging-house, the box on the pier.

When he reached the vicinity, he was pleased to see not only the box but his friend, Toddles. The latter was waiting on a street corner, and greeted him as heartily as ever, his blue eyes gleaming with good-humor.

They made their way secretly to the box, and were soon in their quarters.

"Jolly place!" quoth Toddles, cheerfully. "See the moon over there. She's winking and blinking at us in a right friendly way. Ah! me, but I've seen old Luna blink in many a land!"

"Luna? Who's she?"

"That same imperial moon, friend of all wanderers, be they tramps or millionaires. How has the day gone with you, my hearty?"

"Pooty fair."

"I wish I could say the same, but I can't," and the tramp's voice grew low and grave.

"Say, what would you take me for?"

"Eh?"

"A lone old bachelor, or otherwise? Well, well, why ask you to guess? You see only a vagabond, anyhow—or you would see one, if the moonlight fell more into the Stygian darkness—fine expression!—of this box. Partner, I've been looking for my wife and little boy, to-day!"

"Have you got some?"

"Providence knows, not I. If Death, the Reaper, has held off his heavy hand, I have a wife and boy, somewhere in the world. Nine years old, the child should be, and it's many a year since I've seen him."

Toddles was not in his usual high spirits; his voice was low and grave.

"I'm sorry you couldn't find 'em."

"Ay, ay; I believe you, Jerry. You're one of the white hen's chickens. Yes; I feel a bit weary and discouraged, after my long tramp of to-day. I was in hopes I could find my folks, but—I didn't. Let it pass, though. How long do you expect to sleep in this box?"

"I don't know."

"Wouldn't object to be in better quarters, eh?"

"No."

"If I make a raise, I may be able to get you an attic room, small but comfortable. How would you like that, my hearty, with enough to eat, a fire in winter, books and papers, and me to drop in and chat, now and then?"

Toddles's voice was once more very cheerful, and Jerry's eyes sparkled.

"That'd be prime!" he declared.

"Just so. Well, if I make a raise, I may be able to bring all these things about. You are willing to work, I dare say?"

"You bet!"

"All right, my hearty. Now let us take a nap. I can almost fancy I'm at sea—as I have been many a time—when I hear the water lapping the pier so restlessly. The moon sails on like a big silver dish on a vast table-cloth of blue, star-dotted. Pard, I should fairly adore this location, as a bedroom, were it not that too many odors smite the nostrils here. Perhaps we could breathe through our ears, but that's not Nature's chosen way."

Talking thus in his good-humored way, Toddles lay down in one corner of the box, and Jerry took the other. He was beginning to like the box for a bedroom. It was preferable to Uncle Ben Jones's ill-kept quarters, and it was pleasant to look out and see the moon.

As Toddles had once said, that moon was just as good a friend to them as to the rich and aristocratic.

The night passed in peaceful rest, and, in the morning, they crawled out of the box and went to breakfast. Toddles insisted upon paying for what Jerry ate, and, afterward, gave him twenty five cents. As much as the boy needed the money he hesitated to take it from his ragged friend, but Toddles insisted.

"We part once more," the tramp then remarked.

"Yes."

"Is it the box again, to-night?"

"That's the only place I've got."

"I'll meet you there, but that isn't saying we shall abide there again for a sleep. I hope to make a raise, to-day, big enough to put decent clothes on my back and have something left over. If it transpires that way, we will have a room in some hotel where the prices are reasonable. Now, my hearty, good-by! Remember and come to the box at the usual hour. So-long!"

Once more Toddles shook his young friend's hand and went his way.

Jerry looked after him thoughtfully.

The inclination had been strong in the latter's mind to ask some questions. According to Toddles's own statement, he was in New York to get money from Thomas Reyburton, and he intended to do it on the strength of some secret which he held.

Was it the same secret of which Baker had spoken?

Jerry laid his hand on his pocket. The

precious papers were still there, and he intended to give them to Maurice. Perhaps, though, Toddles knew even more than the papers told; he had spoken of the secret confidently, as though perfectly sure of his position.

The question was: How far was Toddles to be trusted? He had avowed that he was not a mere blackmailer, and was a jolly, generous companion, but natural caution had kept Jerry from confiding in him fully; and he had been afraid that if he began to ask questions, he would get more back than he could meet.

It was still too early to call upon Maurice, so he wandered along the piers, hoping to get a chance to earn a little money.

He was pursuing his way when a cab passed him at a speed so great that the wheels lifted a quantity of the mud which lay in the street and flung it upon the boy's back in a long, irregular line.

He did not mind this; mud and he were not strangers; but it called his attention to the cab more particularly.

There was nothing peculiar about the vehicle, but the horses were large, spirited grays, and from the bridle of each fluttered a bunch of fancifully-knotted ribbons, the colors of which were red, white and blue.

The cab kept on, but paused at a pier some distance below. Jerry saw a man come out to meet it. He opened the cab-door, and a lady alighted. She walked to the pier with the man, and then went on board of a vessel.

Jerry was looking in perplexity.

He thought that she resembled Lovella Henderson, but did not feel sure of the fact.

Still walking on, he continued to watch. The lady gave every indication of going below, but paused at the very moment when the watcher expected her to disappear. She seemed to hesitate, and a visible reluctance was to be observed in her manner. Then her companion swung his arm around her waist and, with a quick, rough motion, half-pushed and half-carried her below.

It looked so much like violence that Jerry hurried along toward the pier. Then he saw that the craft was a small, neat yacht, with the name "Speedwell" visible on her hull.

Just then two men came on deck, and Jerry started as he saw that one was Luther Henderson. Jerry was alarmed. Luther was Lovella's enemy. If she was there, it was plain that she was in trouble.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE JONES FAMILY IN A NEW ROLE.

JERRY placed himself in a position where he would not be conspicuous, and continued to watch the yacht and its surroundings. He hoped to get another look at the lady who had gone below.

Luther Henderson and his companion, who was an ordinary-looking sailor, were engaged in earnest conversation. Jerry could not get near enough to overhear what they said, nor did their manner give any clew.

The cab had disappeared, and the trim little yacht, rocking at the edge of the pier, was an innocent-looking object, but the ex-bootblack was not satisfied.

Had it really been Lovella that he had seen?

If so, what was she doing on a craft where Luther Henderson was also a welcome passenger? He had proved himself her bitter enemy by trying to have her arrested for an alleged theft, and it was positive that neither he nor she would ever consent to resume amicable relations.

The boy was troubled. He watched for half an hour, but there was no change in the situation.

Henderson and the sailor kept their places, and the lady did not reappear.

The doubt and fear became painful, and, seeing a patrolman a block above, Jerry hurried over to him.

"Say, mister, kin I speak ter you?" he asked.

"You can try," was the ungracious reply.

"I'm afeerd thar's trouble over yender."

"Where?"

"On the yacht."

"What's up?"

"I seen a lady go down inter the vessel, an thar's a man on deck that hates her."

"Well, what of that?"

"I'm afeerd he won't let her out."

"All seems to be quiet there."

"So 'tis, but she don't come up."

"How did she get there?"

"She come in a cab."

"Tell me all about it."

Jerry told as much as he thought was prudent in regard to the past he merely stated that he knew Henderson hated Lovella, and he was

conscious that he had not made out a very strong case.

"You say they are relatives?" asked the patrolman.

"Yes, but—"

"And that she came in a cab and went aboard of her own free will?"

"Yes, but—"

"And that all is quiet there now?"

"Don't yer see—"

"No; I *don't* see. Looks to me like a very ordinary affair. There is no evidence of trouble, and you confess that you are not sure the lady was this Miss Henderson of whom you spoke. Even if she is, she and the man may have made up. But the chances are that this lady was a different person. I shall not be able to interfere—you are inclined to be too imaginative. You had better go and play marbles."

Smiling in the fashion of a superior being, the patrolman walked on down the street, swinging his club in a nonchalant way.

Jerry was disappointed, but not surprised. He had never received any great amount of courtesy from policemen, and, as this particular one had said, he had not made out a very strong case.

Nevertheless, the boy was still troubled.

"'Twon't do no good fur me ter watch here," he thought. "While the yacht lays thar she ain't in no great danger, an' the wisest thing I kin do is ter go right ter Maurice. Ef she's in trouble he will soon find it out, an' ef she's all right, I'll git a load off'n my mind."

Believing this to be a case of necessity, he determined to use his money to the end of rapid traveling, so he hurried to the nearest station of the Elevated Road, and went north by this conveyance.

Alighting at Fourteenth street, he hastened over to the house where Maurice lived.

Once more he met with disappointment; Maurice was not in, nor had he been there since Jerry called last.

Greatly disappointed, he sought for means of communicating with Maurice as soon as possible. He went to a stationery-store in Fifth Avenue, and, getting materials, wrote a note. This was a great task. All that he knew about writing, reading or spelling had been taught him by Bess Gray, and that was not much. He did not try to go into particulars, but produced the following brief note:

"Be you shure awl is write with mis Hendr Son? I me afraide She is in trubbel. don't Be scared, but I am goin' two attic ten, and you k n see me thare. yores respectable,
J. Higgs."

The Football of Fortune inclosed this in an envelope, sealed it and carried it to the Fourteenth street house.

This done, he started for Attic 10 in a more easy frame of mind.

When he arrived there, he found Bess and her father, but, before any conversation could be had, there was a knock at the door, and, when Bess answered it, she was surprised to see the whole Jones family—Uncle Ben, Aunt Sue and Tom.

Aunt Sue headed the line, and she had no sooner caught sight of the ex-member of her family, over Bess's shoulder, than she set up a volley of delighted exclamations, her voice being about as musical as the cackling of geese.

"There he is!—there he is! There's Jerry! Oh! you *dear* boy, how glad I am ter see you, an' ter think we was separated by a misunderstanding! Lemme embrace ye, Jerry! Come ter my arms, dear boy!"

She had hurried into the room, her evil, vixenish face expanded in a smile, which, no doubt, was intended to express joy as rapturous as her words; and she would actually have wrapped her long, bony arms around her victim had not Jerry avoided that fate by vacating his chair and dodging her with unusual agility.

He was dumfounded, but wonders had not ceased.

Uncle Ben pushed to the front.

"Worthy youth," he exclaimed, in a wheezy voice, "it does my ol' eyes good ter see ye ag'in. We was afraid we had lost yer, and that"—here Uncle Ben nearly broke down, and maudlin tears coursed down his liquor-marked face—"that would hev been heinous—I mean, melancholy!"

And Tom came in as a chorus:

"Jerry, old-times rock, give us yer flipper! Be Jove! I'm glad ter get me eyes on your mug once more. Put it there, old stock!"

He held out a grimy hand, but Jerry was no more eager to accept this invitation than he had been to repose in Aunt Sue's arms.

He gazed at the trio in bewilderment. Per-

ceiving that they were in their average condition of intoxication, he was at a loss to account for their remarkable change of conduct.

After abusing him for years, and driving him away so recently, they now overflowed with gushing tenderness.

"We hev missed you!" cried Aunt Sue.

"It's been so lonesome!" wheezed Uncle Ben.

"No fun, at all!" declared Tom.

"Oh! that vacant chair!" lamented Aunt Sue, clasping her hands, and rolling her eyes upward.

"An' the absence o' that merry prattle!" croaked Uncle Ben, wiping away his tears.

"Come back ter us!—come back!" Aunt Sue cried, wildly; and once more she opened her arms and made a rush for Jerry.

Her tenderness was nipped in the bud, as it were. Jerry suddenly caught up the broom and brandished it aloft.

"Keep off!" he commanded, in a clear, resolute voice. "Ef yer touches me, I'll hit back! You can't hug me, an' I won't let one on ye lay a finger onter me, you miser'ble hypocrites!"

The Jones trio stood dismayed.

"*Dear* boy, you don't understand!" croaked Aunt Sue; but Jerry's reply came in a quick retort:

"You bet, I understan', but you can't take me in! You want ter make up, but I don't, an' I won't! Want ter beat me ag'in, an' starve me ag'in, do ye? Whar's my brush an' box?"

"You shall hev a new brush an' box!" exclaimed Uncle Ben.

"An' some candy!" added Aunt Sue.

"An' a toy-pistol!" supplemented Tom.

"Now, you hol' right on, all of yer!" Jerry commanded. "Why do ye want me back?"

"We acted hasty, Jerry. We had dranked too much, too. We all hev our weaknesses, dear boy. But now we are sorry; our hearts are heavy; we miss you so much; we know our duty and want ter do it; we hev learned the place ye hev in our hearts, an' ef you will come back, we'll always cherish an' love ye—"

"That'll do!" cried Jerry, his eyes sparkling. "Don't ye think you kin take me in, fur ye can't. I don't know w'ot has struck you all of a suddint, but I do know jest how sincere ye be."

"We all love ye, Jerry—"

"Rubbish! You hate me like p'ison, an' always did; an' the only reason ye want me back is 'cause ye see money in it. But you won't git me; I'll starve afore I'll ever set foot in your room ag'in. You abused me fur years, but you can't do it no more!"

The Jones tribe were speechless.

Was this clear-voiced, resolute boy the same stolid youth they had known?—the "Good-for-Nothing" Jerry whom they had so long misused?

"There's the door," Higgs added. "Let me see ye outside it!"

Anthony Gray suddenly asserted himself.

"Go at once!" he ordered. "Get away, or I will have you arrested!"

Aunt Sue wrung her hands and lamented; Uncle Ben shed more maudlin tears; and Tom pretended to tear out his hair in uncontrollable grief, but their hypocrisy went without reward.

Bess made a feint of seeking a policeman, and, utterly demoralized, the Jones tribe left the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEARCHING FOR THE SPEEDWELL.

UNCLE BEN and his family went out with many a whine and lamentation, but their remarks soon changed. Bess, following to the head of the stairs, heard them break forth when they thought themselves beyond earshot and indulge in language of which no follower of Calvin or of Wesley would approve.

She returned to Attic 10.

"Now, what do you think, Jerry?" she asked, eagerly.

"They've changed their tune," Jerry replied.

"Didn't I tell you that you were either a lost prince, or a rich man's son?"

"Nonsense!"

"And why so?"

"Tain't possible."

"I told you at the very first that they sent you away because they made more money by it, and that some man who is holding your property unlawfully was the one who bribed them!"

Two of Baker's assertions came vividly to Jerry's mind.

The first was that Thomas Reyburton had hired Baker to capture and imprison him—Jerry.

The second was that Reyburton was not the

lawful owner of the family property in his possession.

All this could not help suggesting a strange possibility, and nearly every boy would have caught at it. Jerry did not. The idea occurred to him, but he rejected it promptly. He did not believe either that he was a Reyburton or the heir to wealth.

"Why do the Joneses want ter take me back now?" he inquired, after a pause.

"They've found out who you are, and want to get into your good graces."

This was a strong argument, but it did not convince Jerry.

"They've changed their minds," he admitted, "but they'll do it a good many more times afore I get ter be rich."

"You won't believe in me, Jerry!" remonstrated Bess, in a grieved voice.

"Yes, I will, too!" was the quick response. "It may be so—yes; I *may* be a prince."

"'Twouldn't be so very odd—that is, it might be so."

He tried to assume the air of a believer, but really remained a skeptic.

Once more there was a knock at the door, and this time it was Maurice who made his appearance. He looked troubled and excited.

"Can you tell me— Ah! here is the very person I wanted to see."

Maurice had caught sight of Jerry as he spoke, and he entered the room quickly.

"My lad," he resumed, "let me say that I have not forgotten my promise to help you. I intend to keep it to the letter, and secure a suitable job for you, but more pressing matters demand my attention now. Until I can attend to your case properly, let me compromise matters by giving you something to defray actual daily expenses."

He passed out a crisp bank-note, and Jerry's eyes enlarged as he saw that it was for ten dollars.

"I don't need all of *that*!" he exclaimed.

"Never mind; take it."

"But I ain't earned it!"

"We will not discuss that point. The money is of no importance to me, and it may do you good. Take it without hesitation."

"Perhaps I kin *earn* it. Did yer get my letter?"

"Your letter? No!"

"I lef' one at yer room."

"Concerning what?"

"Miss Lovella. I was afraid—"

"What about her? Have you seen her? She is missing!" Maurice rapidly questioned and asserted, showing considerable excitement. "I have reason to fear that she is in trouble."

"She is! She went in a cab—"

"With gray horses?"

"Yes; an' with red, white an' blue ribbons tied ter the bridles."

"It is the same. Where did you see it?"

"At a pier. She went onter a yacht that laid thar."

"By my life! Luther Henderson has a yacht, and I believe my worst fears are realized."

"This yacht was named the Speedwell."

"It is Luther Henderson's. Tell me all that you know about it."

Jerry obeyed, and gave the account in plain, brief sentences.

"It was Lovella!" Maurice declared; "I feel sure of it. What she went aboard of Henderson's yacht for I cannot conceive, however. Possibly she did not know that he had a craft, for I never heard her refer to nautical matters in any way—or she may not have seen the name. She was decoyed away by a message pretending to come from me."

"That's why she went onter it."

"Very likely. But we are losing time here. My lad, you said that you wanted to earn this money. Pocket it, come with me, and you shall have the desired chance."

Turning abruptly, Maurice left the room and Jerry followed him. On the street stood a waiting cab; they entered and were driven away rapidly.

"We may see rough times," the young man remarked.

"I'll help ye in thick an' thin!" Jerry declared, eagerly.

"You are a trump card!"

Maurice threw off his anxious, gloomy air long enough to give the ex-bootblack a friendly glance, and the latter felt willing to go through fire and water for him. During the last few days Jerry had made more friends than ever before, and they had stirred him up to a pitch of devotion and energy quite surprising to Fortune's Football himself.

It was not a long ride to the pier. They arrived and hurriedly alighted. "Where's the yacht?" Maurice asked. Sure enough, where was she? The open water rippled and shone where the Speedwell had last been seen by Jerry, but the craft was not there.

Eagerly they hastened out to the end of the pier, but, look as far as they might, and did, the missing yacht could not be discerned.

A workman near at hand was interviewed.

"How long have you been here?"

"I've sence dhe roising ave de sun."

"Did you see the yacht go away?"

"Oi did, that."

"Where did she go?"

"Straight down the river, yer Honor."

"Did you see a lady aboard of her, or a lady leave her before she sailed?"

"Oi s'ane a leddy come in a cab an hour or so before dhe vessel sailed, but she did not come up out ave dhe cabin afther she wint below, sor."

"Are you sure?"

"Oi be."

Further questioning gave them no additional information, and they were left to the inevitable conclusion that Lovella had gone away in Luther Henderson's yacht. That she went as a prisoner was beyond doubt.

"She was lured here under the impression that she was going to my own vessel—an easy task, when it is remembered that she knew I had one, but had never seen it."

"Can't ye take yours an' foller?" asked Jerry, quickly.

"I shall try, but the chances are against success, perhaps. My yacht lies at Brooklyn, and, by the time we get her under way, the Speedwell will have obtained a long start. And where has she gone? We have no clew."

"Can't we get on the track by inquiry?"

"We shall try, of course; but the result is in doubt, with the chances against us. Will you keep along?"

"I shall be mighty glad ter!"

"Come, then."

They returned to the cab, Maurice gave fresh directions, and they were driven to Brooklyn.

All of Maurice's sailor-employees lived near where the yacht lay, and as he had good luck in finding them, and the craft was ready for sea, they were under way much sooner than was to be expected.

Heading down the East River, they first made for the lower point of New York. There Maurice landed. Aware that men were always around Castle Garden and Battery Park, he hoped that some of them, or some employee of the ferry company, had seen the Speedwell pass.

Diligent inquiry failed to develop anything, and he was obliged to return to his own yacht unsuccessful.

Where to go was a great conundrum. The Speedwell might have gone to sea, or be lying at Staten Island, or on the New York side of the East River, or at some point which went to make up the long coast-line of Long Island from Gowanus Bay to the Sound.

It was, to use an old expression, like hunting for a needle in a hay-mow.

Anxious to leave no chance untried, Maurice again landed, visited a detective of whom he knew, and engaged that gentleman to work on land while they kept to the water. Several places were in his mind as prisons to which Lovella might be taken, and the detective was to watch these.

Despite this move, he was inclined to think that the girl was still on the Speedwell, and as soon as possible, he returned to the yacht and resumed the search by water.

In this way the day wore on. The search had been thorough, especially along the Long Island shore, but it was the middle of the afternoon before any clew was gained.

Then two men in a row-boat were spoken who were positive that they had seen the Speedwell, before noon, passing up the East River. In their opinion she had kept to the west of Ward's and Randall's Islands.

If this was so, there was strong hope of finding her, for her inevitable course must be up the Harlem. Beset with the fear that, after all, she might have passed through Hell Gate, the pursuers took the western passage.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PURSUERS MEET A TRAMP.

MAURICE soon found fresh cause for annoyance. All day the wind had been blowing strongly, making it the best of yachting

weather, but these conditions suddenly changed. The wind died out almost wholly, making it almost impossible to get the necessary amount to move the yacht.

They crawled up the river at a snail's pace. Young Reyburton watched with anxiety and vexation.

Jerry had given him the papers secured from Baker's house, but he had not taken time to examine them, and the ex-bootblack had not urged the point. Maurice, however, remembered the package at this juncture, and was glad to have anything to occupy his time. He took the papers from his pocket.

"I'll look them over," he remarked. "You say they are important?"

"Yes, an' you'll find bad news—ef it's true."

"Never mind; it may as well come in allopathic doses, as in small ones."

By chance, he first opened Catherine Bartley's letter. Jerry watched as his companion read. He expected to see alarm appear on Maurice's face, but the latter was perfectly calm.

"What does all this mean?" he asked.

"Didn't ye never hear o' Mrs. Bartley?"

"Yes. She was the Reyburton housekeeper, at one time. I remember her well, though I never was much acquainted with her. She was not like the ordinary housekeeper; she was intelligent, and evidently fitted for a station in life far above that which she occupied. She was a very honorable woman, too."

"Do ye b'lieve w'ot she says thar?"

"She asserts that my father was not the true heir of the Reyburton property—that is to say, of the big slice. There are numerous Reyburtons, and all are well-to-do, but the principal fortune is larger than all the others combined. Father holds it now."

Maurice spoke with perfect unconcern.

"D'ye s'pose thar's another heir?"

"I don't know; I always supposed all was regular in father's succession. If there is another man to whom it rightfully belongs, I wish he would come and take the property. It might heal up some differences which now exist."

The speaker's manner was gloomy, and it was plain that his mind was upon the stormy scene which had taken place when his father learned of his acquaintance with Lovella.

Jerry was glad that Maurice took it so coolly.

All his respect and affection had gone out to the man who, from the first, had treated him so kindly, and he felt like a criminal when he handed over the papers which, if the statement was true, would show that the Reyburton money did not belong to Maurice's line.

"I hated ter give ye them papers," Jerry admitted.

"Why?"

"I was afeerd yer would blame me."

"Why should I?" Maurice asked, in surprise.

"Wal, whether you feel willin' or not, it may make ye a good 'al poorer. Some day ye may be sorry."

"Not I! I verily believe the Reyburton property has been a curse—though it need not be, in the hands of a right-minded man. Whoever holds it must, according to precedent, keep up the family feud against the Hendersons. I want no part of it. I am glad you gave me the papers, but I have no idea who the alleged true heir is."

While talking Maurice had not failed to keep up his careful watch on both land and water.

He was growing anxious.

Night was close at hand, and if the fugitives were found it must be soon.

Just as he finished speaking he caught sight of a yacht which lay at a pier. It was strangely familiar, and his heart gave a bound. Often, in the past, he had seen Luther Henderson out on the water, and he believed he recognized that person's craft in that which rocked so quietly by the pier.

By his order they headed for that point.

The shadows of twilight were gathering around the other yacht, and it was not easy to make out her name. A single man was visible, sitting on deck and calmly smoking. He was a bronzed sailor.

A few fathoms more, and the name became distinct.

It was the Speedwell!

The craft was found, but whether Lovella was there was another question. It must be solved at once, and the pursuers headed for the pier. No words were lost at a distance, but their yacht was brought around close to the Speedwell. The old sailor continued to smoke unconcernedly.

"Hallo, my friend!" Maurice began, "is Mr. Henderson aboard?"

"No," was the ready reply.

"Where is he?"

"Don't know."

"Where is Miss Henderson?"

"Never heard of any Miss Henderson," stolidly answered the old sailor.

"I refer to the lady whom you took on board from the North River pier, after she came there in a cab."

"Don't know of any sech person. No lady has been on this yacht sence a week ago, or more."

It was plain that the man was lying deliberately, and Maurice determined to bother no longer with him. The tide was moving the two crafts nearer together, and the occasion seemed to be one when it was worth while to risk something. No policeman was visible, and Maurice was not disposed to delay to seek one.

As the two yachts touched he sprung to the Speedwell's deck, and Jerry and some of the crew followed promptly.

The old sailor did not even rise; he continued to smoke, watching them in a surly way. In this Maurice found proof of his unreliability; he would surely resent any such intrusion unless he knew that it was not the advance of river thugs.

"Now," the young man sternly continued, "you will save yourself a good deal of trouble by showing us over the yacht. You know why we are here, and that we shall neither touch nor molest any of Henderson's property; but I must and will have proof that no prisoner is kept here!"

"You're an unmannerly dog!" growled the old sailor, "but you hev the right o' good clothes, I s'pose. Come along, ef you want to!"

His readiness presaged failure, but Maurice did not hesitate. Bidding all his followers except Jerry remain where they were, he went below with the sailor.

Several minutes passed quietly, and then the trio returned. One look at Maurice's face was enough to show that he had met with disappointment, but he was not done with Henderson's man.

"When did the lady go away?" he asked.

"Ain't seen no lady!"

"You speak falsely, and we know it. Look out that you don't get into trouble. If you come to the point and help us out, you will escape trouble; if you refuse, I'll have you arrested for abduction!"

"Go ahead!" was the unmoved reply.

"Fool! do you want to get into the grasp of the law?"

"No, an' I sha'n't."

"I shall call a policeman, unless you confess."

"Do ye accuse me of abductin' anybody?"

"You were on the craft."

"I ain't afraid o' the consequences."

"Do you refuse to tell me where the lady is?"

"I don't know, an' I wouldn't tell if I did!"

"Suppose you give me a chance, admiral?"

The last words came from the semi-darkness of the pier, and were uttered in the heartiest, most good-humored voice imaginable.

Maurice gazed that way and saw a very ragged man who looked to be a veritable tramp. He stood with his hands in his pockets, and had an air of perfect content hanging around him like a mantle.

"Why, it's Toddles!" cried Jerry.

"Right you are, my hearty!" was the cheerful response. "I've been looking at you, pard, for the last five minutes. Didn't expect to see you in this harbor, but am glad to meet you, all the same."

"How long have you been here?" Maurice demanded.

"Long enough to see the young lady taken away."

"To what place?"

"Come with me, and I'll show you."

"We will do it."

"Before you start, admiral, set a guard over our old salt. He might get there ahead of us, if age has crooked his legs a bit."

The old sailor did not object to this arrangement, and, leaving all of the crew except one man, the rescue-party set out at Toddles's heels. Jerry had told Maurice that the guide was to be trusted, and this statement was taken without fear.

"Have we far to go?" Maurice asked, as they reached the land-end of the pier.

"Only a short distance, admiral. A short horse is soon curried, a small bucket is soon filled, a two-weeks baby's hair is soon combed, and a short story's soon told. I'll tell mine. The lady was taken away from the yacht in a cab, and shut up in a house a couple of blocks away. I saw the racket begun, and watched it out be-

cause I thought I recognized two persons of the Henderson family."

"You were right," Maurice agreed.

"You're not a Henderson?"

"I am a Reyburton."

"With what name in front?"

"Maurice. Thomas Reyburton is my father."

Toddles broke into a chuckle.

"Thought so!" he commented.

The light of the street-lamp near at hand fell full upon the tramp's face as he spoke, and it reflected so many different emotions that Jerry was surprised.

Toddles looked critically at Maurice, eying both his face and form curiously.

"I've heard of the Reyburtons," he added. "Can't say that I'm on speaking terms with any of them, but I may be, later. However, yonder's the house where the lady was incarcerated. Make ready for a fight, my hearties!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HATCHET OF DESTRUCTION.

THE locality was one where the buildings did not form compact squares, but, in many places, were separated by vacant lots. The house where, according to Toddles, Lovella Henderson had been taken, was one of a row of six, each end of which was a field where the city youth, in the daytime, played ball, chased wandering goats and dogs, and rent the air with shouts.

As it was almost wholly dark at the time when the rescue-party approached, none of these boys were visible.

Maurice Reyburton advanced and knocked at the door. There was no answer. Twice he repeated the summons, but without effect.

"There ain't no light," remarked the member of his crew whom he had taken along, "an' I don't believe they're here."

"They came here!" Toddles asserted, positively.

"Depend upon it, they are hiding," Maurice decided. "We will go in if I have to call an officer."

Jerry Higgs had an idea of his own, and he hastened around the end of the row of houses. Each had an entrance upon the vacant lot, no doubt, and a better chance to escape could not be had.

He turned the corner and marked the door which belonged to the house under suspicion, but, before he could reach it, several persons came out quickly. He saw that one was a woman, and, though he could not distinguish her face, he felt sure that it was Lovella. He rushed back to where he could see his allies.

"Here they be!" he cried. "This way! They're makin' off! Come on!"

And then he ran back to the rear, arriving just in time to see the fugitives hurrying across the field.

It needed only one glance to detect that the woman was being forced along, and Jerry darted across the field like a racer. He covered the intervening space in a very short time, and, as he came nearer, recognized both Lovella and Luther Henderson.

The girl saw the ex-bootblack and uttered a cry.

"Help! help!"

Jerry sprang at Luther in a fury. Winding his arms around the abductor's neck, he hung on pertinaciously. Henderson struggled in vain to dislodge him, but, as the boy's feet did not touch the ground, succeeded in making Jerry's legs fly about in wild circles and curves.

Again Lovella called for help, and her small defender added his voice. Help was at hand. Maurice and his men reached the spot, and Toddles's first act was to knock Luther down in a scientific way.

"Avast, there!" growled the world-wanderer; "you're shaking my pard up badly, and I won't stand that. Hurt, my hearty?"

The last question was to Jerry, who had scrambled to his feet.

"Not an artom!" the boy declared.

"Bravo for you!"

The fight was over almost as soon as it began. Henderson's men would not stand by him, and the arch-plotter, himself, was dazed by Toddles's vigorous blow. Lovella was in Maurice's arms.

A policeman put in an appearance.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"Nobody's down, but him," returned Jerry, pointing to Henderson.

"Officer," added Maurice, "we desire you to arrest that fellow for abduction!"

His manner impressed the patrolman favorably, and that gentleman laid a heavy hand on Luther's collar.

"Here ye be, cully!" he announced. "O'i'll run yez in, in de shake ave a deer's hoof!"

"Luther can bring no charge against me," Lovella whispered to her lover. "He has confessed that he has recovered the lost deed from the real thief, who took it from the valise at the ferry-house."

The next few moments were devoted to business. Henderson begged for mercy, but Maurice would not grant it. A station-house was near at hand, and he went with the officer and made a formal charge. The plotter was then locked up.

When again outside Maurice sought his friends and addressed Toddles and Jerry earnestly.

"You, my boy, have nobly earned the ten dollars I gave you. Only for your quick wit we should have lost our game. Believe me, I know how to reward those who serve me, and if you will come to me to-morrow, I will prove the fact."

He then turned to Toddles.

"To you, sir, I owe an equal debt of gratitude. Had you not been on hand at the pier, we should have been wholly at fault. Excuse my plainness, but you seem to be in hard luck and out of money. I will reward you in the fullest degree."

Toddles chuckled.

"I've heard it said the Reyburtons were generous," he quietly replied.

"I will not see the reputation lost."

"Thanks, admiral. I'll try to meet your generosity in a way that won't lower my reputation. No man in rags should be mean."

His bright-blue eyes twinkled merrily as he spoke, and Maurice felt that nothing was truer than that a good heart is just as likely to be found under rags as under broadcloth and irreproachable linen.

All of our friends went aboard the yacht, which then made off down the river. It was nearly eleven o'clock when they landed again on the North River side of Gotham. There Jerry and Toddles left the others. Maurice would have seen them housed in comfortable quarters, but Toddles objected, and said that the next day was soon enough for them to "put on the gaudy raiment of over-vaulting pride," as he called the promised good clothes.

"We want to have another night in our bonny box," Toddles explained to Jerry, when they had been left behind by the rest of the party. "If our fine gentleman keeps his word we shall not have the blessed privilege of looking out at the moon smiling on the pier, and the laughing water, again. We shall have to wear a collar that will compress our wind-pipes until we can't draw a long breath without bending our heads over back!"

To the box they went, and the world-wanderer was soon enjoying the moon and the river.

"I'm happy, to night," he observed.

"I'm glad o' that."

"Thank you, my hearty. You see, I found my wife and boy, to-day. Great Scott! you ought to see that boy—and you shall, later. Chip of the old block, I do declare; a regular Toddles, on a small scale. I'm all right now, pard; blow high or blow low, I have my family back."

"Nobody but you an' them is so glad as I be!" Jerry asserted, heartily.

"Pard, you're a good one; eighteen-carat fine. When I quit this box, I shall not lose track of you. I intend to shake off the hard lines of a tramp, and be a good citizen; and I shall always welcome you at my fireside. It will be humble, of course, but hearts, not dollars, make the real spirit of home. You've been a good messmate, and we want to keep up our intimacy. Eh, my hearty?"

Jerry's voice was unsteady when he answered. The straightforward, kind manner of his companion touched him deeply. What if Toddles did wear rags and call himself a tramp? He had a jolly, whole-hearted way, and, from the beginning of their acquaintance, his conduct had been free from all that approached what was profane or vicious.

A rare fellow was Toddles, Jerry thought.

Conversation went on for half an hour longer. Toddles had found his wife and boy in such quarters that he could not pass the night with them, but he hoped for better things.

"I haven't seen Thomas Reyburton, yet," he remarked, "but I trust I shall be a few dollars richer by another night."

Soundly slept the two friends when once they gave attention to that pleasure. In the morning they again breakfasted together. Then Toddles abruptly observed:

"I believe your friend of Attic 10 is named Anthony Gray?"

"That's it," Jerry replied.

"I've a fancy for seeing him. Will you take me there?"

Jerry caught at the chance. He wanted Bess to see his new friend.

To Attic 10 they went, and Toddles was duly introduced.

"Glad to meet you all!" he declared, his blue eyes gleaming jovially. "Jerry's friends are my friends, and I hope we may be willing to know each other for each other's sake."

"I'm sure it will be a pleasure on our part," returned Bess, with her quaint, womanly air.

"Thank you, young lady; may your bright eyes ever beam as kindly upon me!"

"Jerry's judgment of people is good."

"She has proved it by liking you."

Anthony Gray had been looking at the strange caller in a bewildered, steadfast manner. He now spoke in a peculiar voice:

"Pardon me, sir, but what did Jerry say your name was?"

"Toddles."

Mr. Gray shook his head and sighed.

"Do I resemble any one you ever knew?" Toddles asked.

"Indeed, you do!"

"May I ask his name?"

"It was Richard—"

"Enough, Anthony Gray; enough! Look here!"

Toddles shoved up his tattered sleeve, exposing the scar of what must once have been a bad wound. Gray uttered a loud cry.

"Mr. Richard!—it is Mr. Richard!" he cried, wildly. "He has come back from the grave!"

"Back from world-wide wandering," Toddles amended, in an unsteady voice, "and I find you faithful—"

He had reached out to take the old gentleman's hand, but Gray rushed away like a madman. In one corner lay a hatchet. He seized it, and rushing to his old saddle, began to slash away at his seat of many years with blows delivered with nervous strength.

CHAPTER XVII.

A REYBURTON ABOVE REPROACH.

THOMAS REYBURTON sat in a private room of his mansion. Magnificence was all around him, but he was not happy; his face was pale, and it bore a gloomy, troubled expression as he confronted two men who were unwelcome callers at that moment.

These men were John Joy and his fellow-schemer, Baker.

Silence had fallen upon the trio, but it was broken by Joy:

"Yes, Reyburton; it's a clear case. You ain't the legal holder of the family wealth, and a word from us can deprive you of it all. Now, it depends upon you to say whether you will lose all or keep the boodle. Pay us well, and your secret is safe."

"Can you prove that the boy is the legal heir?" Reyburton slowly asked.

"We can prove his identity, and the other evidence, while not absolute proof, perhaps, owing to the absence of Catherine Bartley's statement, is lucid enough to involve you in a losing law-suit, if we let the boy on to the secret."

Thomas Reyburton frowned moodily.

"I shall have to be convinced as to the boy's identity first," he responded.

"That part is easy."

Joy smiled upon the master of the house in a manner of insolent familiarity. He was engaged in blackmail, pure and simple, but knew that Reyburton dared not expose him.

At this critical point some one opened the door without the ceremony of knocking. Reyburton looked around angrily, but his reproof remained unspoken when he saw who were there.

Maurice came first, but close behind him were a man and a boy. Their most intimate friends might well have been slow to recognize them. It was Toddles and Jerry, clad in good garments and otherwise improved. The greatest change was in Toddles, who had parted with his beard and two-thirds of his hair. The change in him was wonderful, and he might have been mistaken for a bank president.

Jerry, too, was greatly improved, but he appeared to be bewildered.

"Father," said Maurice, quickly, "I hope you will pardon this intrusion when I explain that we are here to rid you of those blood-seekers. You may safely call a servant and have them kicked out like the curse that they are!"

Joy sprang to his feet in a fury.

"Dare to apply that term to us again!" he

cried, "and I will see you thrown into the street, bag and baggage; and for good and all!"

"How will you do it, boaster?"

"By proving that you and Thomas Reyburton hold this property unlawfully; by proving that the real heir is a boy named Edward Reyburton!"

"You cannot prove it!"

"I can!"

"I defy you to do it!"

"By the fiends! I will do it, and make beggars of you and your father—unless you pay me handsomely!"

Toddles pushed to the front.

"Avast there!" growled the world-wanderer, in sharp menace. "You're crazy!"

"What business is this of yours?"

Toddles smiled quietly.

"Well, I naturally feel interested when you speak of Edward Reyburton, for he is my son. Gentlemen, let me introduce myself—Richard Reyburton, at your service!"

Thomas Reyburton fell back in the chair from which he had risen. His face was paler than ever.

"Back from the grave!" he gasped.

"You see that he recognizes me," resumed the world-wanderer, still addressing the would-be blackmailers; "and I think you may now retire from the case. Don't trouble yourself to espouse the cause of nine-year-old Edward, for I, his father, will care for him. Joy and Baker, a detective awaits to escort you to Police Headquarters; you are wanted there!"

The baffled rascals stormed and protested, but all in vain. They were taken away.

The master of the house had been looking in silent dismay at Richard Reyburton—we will call him Toddles no longer—but he was now addressed by the latter in a voice remarkable for its indifference.

"Thomas Reyburton, I do not think we need to have any scene. You knew when you took the estate that it was not yours, and you have of late plotted to hold your ill-gotten inheritance; but your wrong-doing has not been so flagrant of late that I am disposed to tarnish the family name by prosecuting you publicly. I will let it all drop on one condition."

"What is that?" Thomas asked, in a low voice.

"That you consent to the marriage of your son and Lovella Henderson—"

"Never! never!" almost shouted the old gentleman, glaring madly around. "I'll lie in prison until I die rather than do that—"

"Enough! We will not urge you now, but they will marry just the same. Moreover, the family feud will be dropped. I am the head of the Reyburton family; Lovella holds one-half of the big Henderson property. Let the weak branches fight; the main trunks of the rival trees will quarrel no more. Bah! I hate to speak of it. The quarrel has been ridiculous. Begun by a lawsuit over certain city property, it has gone on for several decades, kept alive by mean acts on both sides. Thank heaven, it bids fair to die now."

The speaker turned to Maurice.

"By assuming my right I not only deprive your father of his property, but you of the future succession; but you and I will never pull in opposite directions, I am sure."

"When Belknap Reyburton died I was the direct heir, being his nephew, but only one man knew that I was alive. I had quarreled with the old gentleman, and gone away to be a sailor. Chance led to the incorrect identification of the body of a drowned man as mine. Thomas Reyburton knew of the truth, but he never told any one else; he wrongfully took the property. When years passed and I did not appear, he, too, thought me dead."

"Really, I had become a married man. I, however, remained a rover on sea and land, disdainful of my inheritance. Three years ago my ship was lost and I was cast upon Easter Island in the South Pacific. My wife thought me dead and came to New York with our boy. At last I was rescued. I hurried here where I knew my family had preceded me, and arrived in rags. For weeks I had been a mere tramp, except that I had a purpose and a hope in life."

"Among the Reyburton employees was Catherine Bartley, a very intelligent woman. She chanced to find certain papers which Thomas carelessly allowed to exist; they showed that I still lived and was the real heir. She spoke to Thomas, and he frightened her so, that, being a timid woman, she dared not tell the truth; but she was soon taken with a fatal illness, and left a sworn statement."

"When she died, the affidavit fell into the

hands of one Anthony Gray. He was an ex-lawyer's clerk and had the Reyburton interests at heart, having long done a humble part of their business; but he was old, irresolute, and feeble of body and mind. Instead of making the paper public, he secreted it in a saddle I had once given him and waited for me to return. He has to-day delivered the paper to me, and as it proves—taken in connection with other papers secured by Jerry Higgs from a man named Baker—that the drowned man was not I, I shall have no trouble in proving that I am Richard Reyburton."

"Jerry Higgs is, really, named Richard Bartley. His name was changed after his mother's death, when he was a babe. He was the housekeeper's son—his father died when the boy was an infant—and was named for me. When his mother died, Jerry became a waif and experienced a hard life. Really, Thomas Reyburton kept track of him, for he thought that Jerry had possession, somewhere, of his mother's papers."

"Recently, Thomas learned of my wife and son, and, alarmed lest they should find Jerry, he went to the Jones family and hired them to send Jerry away, hoping he might leave New York, or be lost to sight. This was done, though a visit by Joy to the Joneses has since shown them their fatal blunder in breaking with their bootblack slave."

"But, it was the best thing that ever happened to Jerry when he was sent adrift. It was the means of his meeting both Maurice Reyburton and myself; he has done us great favors, and in my heart he has to-day a place second only to my own child and my wife!"

Stepping forward, Richard laid his hand on Jerry's shoulder.

"My hearty, you and I part only when one of us dies. No more shall we sleep in the box on the pier, but we can see the moon and the twinkling waters from a fairer point of view. I see in you, Richard Bartley—I think I shall still call you Jerry—the making of a fine man, and my purse will always be open to you. An education will be the next thing in order, and then you shall conquer the world under my guidance, backed, if need be, by my money!"

"Mr. Reyburton, you're very good!" faltered Jerry.

"Avast, my hearty! Give me only my due. We were parads in rags; let us be parads in prosperity."

The speaker turned to Maurice.

"Friend, I have robbed you of an inheritance, but our name and our blood are the same. Shall we remain good friends?"

"Gladly!" Maurice declared. "You are welcome to the Reyburton property. What I inherited from my mother leaves me still rich. Let us be friends in name and deed!"

They clasped hands, and then Richard Reyburton reached out and took that of Jerry.

"And let us both be friends to this brave, modest and intelligent boy!" he said, very earnestly.

"We will, to the end!" Maurice declared.

And Jerry, his heart too full for utterance, looked up through his happy tears to see two kind faces smiling upon him.

They did not think him a good-for-nothing, and he was no longer a football of fortune.

The end can be foreseen.

Luther Henderson, Baker and Joy were sent to prison.

The Jones family lived in poverty and misery, dividing their spare time between bewailing the fact that they had sent Jerry away, and the other stern fact that they had to take to work, themselves, or starve. They did the one and almost did the other.

Thomas Reyburton lived his remaining years unmolested, but was a sour, disappointed man. When Maurice and Lovella were married, he would not attend the ceremony, and, hating the Hendersons as much as ever, lived apart from all his kin.

Anthony Gray was made comfortable during the rest of his days, and when he died, Richard Reyburton took charge of Bess and reared her as carefully as he did Jerry.

After marriage, Maurice and Lovella lived in peace and happiness.

Richard Reyburton proved to be the wisest of his name. He ignored the family feud, which died for want of breath. He was at once prudent and generous, and was very happy with his wife and boy.

Not once did his devotion to Jerry waver, and in due time, helped on by him, the boy graduated at Yale College.

The other day, when Mr. Richard Bartley and Miss Bessie Gray were married, the first to take the groom's hand was his leading benefactor, and both blessed the night when, as Toddles and Good-for-Nothing Jerry, they met in the box on the pier for the first time.

THE END.

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